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AN ESSAY

ON THE

PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION;

OR,

A VIEW OF ITS PAST AND PRESENT EFFECTS

ON

HUMAN HAPPINESS;

WITH

AN INQUIRY INTO OUR PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE FUTURE REMOVAL OR MITIGATION OF THE EVILS WHICH IT OCCASIONS.

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BOOK III.

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Of increasing Wealth, as it affects the Condition of the Poor.

THE professed object of Adam Smith's *Inquiry* is *the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.* There is another, however, still more interesting, which he occasionally mixes with it—the causes which affect the happiness and comfort of the lower orders of society, which in every nation form the most numerous class. These two subjects are, no doubt, nearly connected; but the nature and extent of this connexion, and the mode in which increasing

creasing wealth operates on the condition of the poor, have not been stated with sufficient correctness and precision.

Adam Smith, in his chapter on the wages of labour, considers every increase in the stock or revenue of the society as an increase in the funds for the maintenance of labour; and having before laid down the position that the demand for those who live by wages can only increase in proportion to the increase of the funds for the payment of wages, the conclusion naturally follows, that every increase of wealth tends to increase the demand for labour and to improve the condition of the lower classes of society [a].

Upon a nearer examination, however, it will be found that the funds for the maintenance of labour do not necessarily increase with the increase of wealth, and very rarely increase in *proportion* to it; and that the condition of the lower classes of society does not depend exclusively upon the increase of the funds for the maintenance of

[a] Vol. i. book i. c. 8.

labour,

labour, or the power of supporting a greater number of labourers.

Adam Smith defines the wealth of a state to be the annual produce of its land and labour. This definition evidently includes manufactured produce as well as the produce of the land. Now, upon the supposition that a nation, from peculiar situation and circumstances, was unable to procure an additional quantity of food, it is obvious that the produce of its labour would not necessarily come to a stand, although the produce of its land or its power of importing corn were incapable of further increase. If the materials of manufactures could be obtained either at home or from abroad, improved skill and machinery might work them up to a greatly increased amount with the same number of hands, and even the number of hands might be considerably increased by an increased taste for manufactures, compared with war and menial service, and by the employment consequently of a greater proportion of the whole population in manufacturing and commercial labour

That such a case does not frequently occur will be most readily allowed. It is not only however possible, but forms the specific limit to the increase of population in the natural progress of cultivation, with which limit, the limit to the further progress of wealth is obviously not contemporary. But though cases of this kind do not often occur, because these limits are seldom reached; yet approximations to them are constantly taking place, and in the usual progress of improvement the increase of wealth and capital is rarely accompanied with a proportionately increased power of supporting an additional number of labourers.

Some ancient nations, which, according to the accounts we have received of them, possessed but an inconsiderable quantity of manufacturing and commercial capital, appear to have cultivated their lands highly by means of an agrarian division of property, and were unquestionably very populous. In such countries, though full of people already, there would evidently be room for a very great increase of capital and riches; but,

but, allowing all the weight that is in any degree probable to the increased production or importation of food occasioned by the stimulus of additional capital, there would evidently not be room for a proportionate increase of the means of subsistence.

If we compare the early state of our most flourishing European kingdoms with their present state, we shall find this conclusion confirmed almost universally by experience.

Adam Smith, in treating of the different progress of opulence in different nations, says, that England, since the time of Elizabeth, has been continually advancing in commerce and manufactures. He then adds, " The cultivation and improvement " of the country has no doubt been gra- " dually advancing. But it seems to have " followed slowly and at a distance the " more rapid progress of commerce and " manufactures. The greater part of the " country must probably have been culti- " vated before the reign of Elizabeth, and " a very great part of it still remains un- " cultivated, and the cultivation of the far " greater part is much inferior to what it " might

" might be*." The same observation is applicable to most of the other countries of Europe. The best land would naturally be the first occupied. This land, even with that sort of indolent cultivation and great waste of labour which particularly marked the feudal times, would be capable of supporting a considerable population; and on the increase of capital, the increasing taste for conveniences and luxuries, combined with the decreasing power of production in the new land to be taken into cultivation, would naturally and necessarily direct the greatest part of this new capital to commerce and manufactures, and occasion a more rapid increase of wealth than of population.

The population of England accordingly in the reign of Elizabeth appears to have been nearly five millions, which would not be very far short of the half of what it is at present; but when we consider the very great proportion which the products of commercial and manufacturing industry now bear to the quantity of food raised for human con-

* Vol. ii. book iv. c. 4, p. 133.

sumption,

sumption, it is probably a very low estimate to say that the mass of wealth or the stock and revenue of the country must, independently of any change in the value of the circulating medium, have increased above four times. Few of the other countries in Europe have increased to the same extent in commercial and manufacturing wealth as England; but as far as they have proceeded in this career, all appearances clearly indicate that the progress of their general wealth has been greater than the progress of their means of supporting an additional population.

That every increase of the stock or revenue of a nation cannot be considered as an increase of the real funds for the maintenance of labour will appear in a striking light in the case of China.

Adam Smith observes, that China has probably long been as rich as the nature of her laws and institutions will admit; but intimates that with other laws and institutions, and if foreign commerce were held in honour, she might still be much richer.

If trade and foreign commerce were held

in

in great honour in China, it is evident that, from the great number of her labourers and the cheapness of her labour, she might work up manufactures for foreign sale to a great amount. It is equally evident that, from the great bulk of provisions and the prodigious extent of her inland territory, she could not in return import such a quantity as would be any sensible addition to her means of subsistence. Her immense amount of manufactures therefore she would either consume at home, or exchange for luxuries collected from all parts of the world. At present the country appears to be overpeopled compared with what its stock can employ, and no labour is spared in the production of food. An immense capital could not be employed in China in preparing manufactures for foreign trade, without altering this state of things, and taking off some labourers from agriculture, which might have a tendency to diminish the produce of the country. Allowing, however, that this would be made up, and indeed more than made up, by the beneficial effects of improved skill and economy of

labour

labour in the cultivation of the poorest lands, yet, as the quantity of subsistence could be but little increased, the demand for manufactures which would raise the price of labour, would necessarily be followed by a proportionate rise in the price of provisions, and the labourer would be able to command but little more food than before. The country would, however, obviously be advancing in wealth; the exchangeable value of the annual produce of its land and labour would be annually augmented; yet the real funds for the maintenance of labour would be nearly stationary. The argument perhaps appears clearer when applied to China, because it is generally allowed that its wealth has been long stationary, and its soil cultivated nearly to the utmost[a].

In all these cases, it is not on account of

[a] How far this latter opinion is to be depended upon it is not very easy to say. Improved skill and a saving of labour would certainly enable the Chinese to cultivate some lands with advantage which they cannot cultivate now, but the more general use of horses instead of men might prevent this extended cultivation from giving any encouragement to an increase of people.

any

any undue preference given to commerce and manufactures, compared with agriculture, that the effect just described takes place, but merely because the powers of the earth in the production of food have narrower limits than the skill and tastes of mankind in giving value to raw materials, and consequently in the approach towards the limits of subsistence there is naturally more room, and consequently more encouragement, for the increase of the one species of wealth than of the other.

It must be allowed then, that the funds for the maintenance of labour do not *necessarily* increase with the increase of wealth, and very *rarely* increase in *proportion* to it.

But the condition of the lower classes of society certainly does not depend exclusively upon the increase of the funds for the maintenance of labour, or the means of supporting more labourers. That these means form always a very powerful ingredient in the condition of the poor, and the main ingredient in the increase of population, is unquestionable. But, in the first place, the comforts of the lower classes of society

society do not depend solely upon food, nor even upon strict necessaries; and they cannot be considered as in a good state unless they have the command of some conveniences and even luxuries. Secondly, the tendency in population fully to keep pace with the means of subsistence must in general prevent the increase of these means from having a great and permanent effect in improving the condition of the poor. And, thirdly, the cause which has the most lasting effect in improving the situation of the lower classes of society depends chiefly upon the conduct and prudence of the individuals themselves, and is therefore not immediately and necessarily connected with an increase in the means of subsistence.

With a view therefore to the other causes which affect the condition of the labouring classes, as well as the increase of the means of subsistence, it may be desirable to trace more particularly the mode in which increasing wealth operates, and to state both the disadvantages as well as the advantages with which it is accompanied.

In

In the natural and regular progress of a country to a state of great wealth and population, there are two disadvantages to which the lower classes of society seem necessarily to be subjected. The first is, a diminished power of supporting children under the existing habits of the society with respect to the necessaries of life. And the second—the employment of a larger proportion of the population in occupations less favourable to health, and more exposed to fluctuations of demand and unsteadiness of wages.

A diminished power of supporting children is an absolutely unavoidable consequence of the progress of a country towards the utmost limits of its population. If we allow that the power of a given quantity of territory to produce food has some limit, we must allow that as this limit is approached, and the increase of population becomes slower and slower, the power of supporting children will be less and less, till finally, when the increase of produce stops, it becomes only sufficient to maintain, on an average, families of such a size as will

not allow of a further addition of numbers. This state of things is generally accompanied by a fall in the *corn* price of labour; but should this effect be prevented by the prevalence of prudential habits among the lower classes of society, still the result just described must take place; and though, from the powerful operation of the preventive check to increase, the wages of labour estimated even in corn might not be low, yet it is obvious that in this case the power of supporting children would rather be nominal than real; and the moment this power began to be exercised to its apparent extent, it would cease to exist.

The second disadvantage to which the lower classes of society are subjected in the progressive increase of wealth is, that a larger portion of them is engaged in unhealthy occupations, and in employments in which the wages of labour are exposed to much greater fluctuations than in agriculture, and the simpler kinds of domestic trade.

On the state of the poor employed in manufactories with respect to health, and the fluctuations

fluctuations of wages, I will beg leave to quote a passage from Dr. Aikin's Description of the Country round Manchester:—

"The invention and improvements of ma-
" chines to shorten labour have had a sur-
" prising influence to extend our trade,
" and also to call in hands from all parts,
" particularly children for the cotton-mills.
" It is the wise plan of Providence, that in
" this life there shall be no good without its
" attendant inconvenience. There are
" many which are too obvious in these cot-
" ton-mills, and similar factories, which
" counteract that increase of population
" usually consequent on the improved faci-
" lity of labour. In these, children of a
" very tender age are employed, many of
" them collected from the work-houses in
" London and Westminster, and trans-
" ported in crowds as apprentices to mas-
" ters resident many hundred miles distant,
" where they serve unknown, unprotected
" and forgotten by those to whose care
" nature or the laws had consigned them.
" These children are usually too long con-

" fined

" fined to work in close rooms, often during
" the whole night. The air they breathe
" from the oil, &c., employed in the ma-
" chinery, and other circumstances, is in-
" jurious; little attention is paid to their
" cleanliness; and frequent changes from
" a warm and dense to a cold and thin at-
" mosphere are predisposing causes to
" sickness and debility, and particularly to
" the epidemic fever which is so generally
" to be met with in these factories. It is
" also much to be questioned if society does
" not receive detriment from the manner
" in which children are thus employed
" during their early years. They are not
" generally strong to labour, or capable of
" pursuing any other branch of business
" when the term of their apprenticeship
" expires. The females are wholly unin-
" structed in sewing, knitting, and other
" domestic affairs requisite to make them
" notable and frugal wives and mothers.
" This is a very great misfortune to them
" and to the public, as is sadly proved by
" a comparison of the families of labourers
" in husbandry and those of manufac-
" turers

" turers in general. In the former we meet " with neatness, cleanliness and comfort; " in the latter with filth, rags and poverty, " although their wages may be nearly " double to those of the husbandman. It " must be added that the want of early re- " ligious instruction and example, and the " numerous and indiscriminate association " in these buildings, are very unfavourable " to their future conduct in life[a]."

In the same work it appears that the register for the collegiate church of Manchester, from Christmas, 1793, to Christmas, 1794, shewed a decrease of 168 marriages, 538 christenings, and 250 burials. In the parish of Rochdale, in the neighbourhood, a still more melancholy reduction in proportion to the number of people took place. In 1792 the births were 746, the burials

[a] P. 219. Dr. Aikin says that endeavours have been made to remedy these evils, which in some factories have been attended with success. And it is very satisfactory to be able to add, that since this account was written, the situation of the children employed in the cotton-mills has been further very essentially improved, partly by the interference of the legislature, and partly by the humane and liberal exertions of individuals.

646,

646, and the marriages 339. In 1794 the births were 373, the burials 671, and the marriages 199. The cause of this sudden check to population was the failure of demand and of commercial credit which occurred at the commencement of the war, and such a check could not have taken place in so sudden a manner without the most severe distress, occasioned by the sudden reduction of wages.

In addition to the fluctuations arising from the changes from peace to war and from war to peace, it is well known how subject particular manufactures are to fail from the caprices of taste. The weavers of Spitalfields were plunged into the most severe distress by the fashion of muslins instead of silks; and great numbers of workmen in Sheffield and Birmingham were for a time thrown out of employment owing to the adoption of shoe strings and covered buttons, instead of buckles and metal buttons. Our manufactures, taken in the mass, have increased with prodigious rapidity, but in particular places they have failed; and the parishes where this has happened are in-

variably loaded with a crowd of poor in the most distressed and miserable condition.

In the evidence brought before the House of Lords during the inquiries which preceded the Corn-Bill of 1815, various accounts are produced from different manufactories, intended to shew that the high price of corn has rather the effect of lowering than of raising the price of manufacturing labour [a]. Adam Smith has clearly and correctly stated that the money price of labour depends upon the money price of provisions, and the state of the demand and the supply of labour. And he shews how much he thinks it is occasionally affected by the latter cause, by explaining in what manner it may vary in an opposite direction from the price of provisions during the pressure of a scarcity. The accounts brought before the House of Lords are a striking illustration of this part of his proposition; but they certainly do not prove the incorrectness of the other part of it, as it is quite obvious that, whatever may take place for a few years, the supply of manufacturing labour cannot

[a] Reports, p. 51.

possibly

possibly be continued in the market unless the natural or necessary price, that is, the price necessary to continue it in the market, be paid, and this of course is not done unless the money price be so proportioned to the price of provisions, that labourers are enabled to bring up families of such a size as will supply the number of hands required.

But though these accounts do not in any degree invalidate the usual doctrines respecting labour, or the statements of Adam Smith, they shew very clearly the great fluctuations to which the condition of the manufacturing labourer is subjected.

In looking over these accounts it will be found that in some cases the price of weaving has fallen a third, or nearly one-half, at the same time that the price of wheat has risen a third, or nearly one half; and yet these proportions do not always express the full amount of the fluctuations, as it sometimes happens that when the price is low, the state of the demand will not allow of the usual number of hours of working; and when the price is high, it will admit of extra hours.

That from the same causes there are sometimes variations of a similar kind in the price of task-work in agriculture will be readily admitted; but, in the first place, they do not appear to be nearly so considerable; and secondly, the great mass of agricultural labourers is employed by the day, and a sudden and general fall in the money price of agricultural day-labour is an event of extremely rare occurrence [a].

It must be allowed then, that in the natural and usual progress of wealth, the means of marrying early and supporting a family are diminished, and a greater proportion of the population is engaged in employments less favourable to health and morals, and more subject to fluctuations in the price of labour, than the population employed in agriculture.

These are no doubt considerable disadvantages, and they would be sufficient to

[a] Almost the only instance on record in this country is that which has lately taken place (1815 and 1816), occasioned by an unparalleled fall in the exchangeable value of the raw produce, which has necessarily disabled the holders of it from employing the same quantity of labour at the same price.

render

render the progress of riches decidedly unfavourable to the condition of the poor, if they were not counteracted by advantages which nearly, if not fully, counterbalance them.

And, first, it is obvious that the profits of stock are that source of revenue from which the middle classes are chiefly maintained; and the increase of capital, which is both the cause and effect of increasing riches, may be said to be the efficient cause of the emancipation of the great body of society from a dependence on the landlords. In a country of limited extent, consisting of fertile land divided into large properties, as long as the capital remains inconsiderable, the structure of society is most unfavourable to liberty and good government. This was exactly the state of Europe in the feudal times. The landlords could in no other way spend their incomes than by maintaining a great number of idle followers; and it was by the growth of capital in all the employments to which it is directed that the pernicious power of the landlords was destroyed, and their dependent

pendent followers were turned into merchants, manufacturers, tradesmen, farmers, and independent labourers;—a change of prodigious advantage to the great body of society, including the labouring classes.

Secondly; in the natural progress of cultivation and wealth, the production of an additional quantity of corn will require more labour, while, at the same time, from the accumulation and better distribution of capital, the continual improvements made in machinery, and the facilities opened to foreign commerce, manufactures and foreign commodities will be produced or purchased with less labour; and consequently a given quantity of corn will command a much greater quantity of manufactures and foreign commodities than while the country was poor. Although, therefore, the labourer may earn less corn than before, the superior value which every portion which he does not consume in kind will have in the purchase of conveniences, may more than counterbalance this diminution. He will not indeed have the same power of maintaining a large

a large family; but with a small family he may be better lodged and clothed, and better able to command the decencies and comforts of life.

Thirdly; it seems to be proved by experience, that the lower classes of society seldom acquire a decided taste for conveniences and comforts till they become plentiful compared with food, which they never do till food has become in some degree scarce. If the labourer can obtain the full support of himself and family by two or three days' labour; and if, to furnish himself with conveniences and comforts, he must work three or four days more, he will generally think the sacrifice too great compared with the objects to be obtained, which are not strictly necessary to him, and will therefore often prefer the luxury of idleness to the luxury of improved lodging and clothing. This is said by Humboldt to be particularly the case in some parts of South America, and to a certain extent prevails in Ireland, India, and all countries where food is plentiful compared with capital and manufactured commodities. On the other hand,

hand, if the main part of the labourer's time be occupied in procuring food, habits of industry are necessarily generated, and the remaining time, which is but inconsiderable compared with the commodities it will purchase, is seldom grudged. It is under these circumstances, particularly when combined with a good government, that the lower classes of society are most likely to acquire a decided taste for the conveniences and comforts of life; and this taste may be such as even to prevent, after a certain period, a further fall in the corn price of labour. But if the corn price of labour continues tolerably high while the relative value of commodities compared with corn falls very considerably, the labourer is placed in a most favourable situation. Owing to his decided taste for conveniences and comforts, the good corn wages of labour will not generally lead to early marriages; yet in individual cases, where large families occur, there will be the means of supporting them independently, by the sacrifice of the accustomed conveniences and comforts; and thus the poorest

of

of the lower classes will rarely be stinted in food, while the great mass of them will not only have sufficient means of subsistence, but be able to command no inconsiderable quantity of those conveniences and comforts, which, at the same time that they gratify a natural or acquired want, tend unquestionably to improve the mind and elevate the character.

On an attentive review then of the effects of increasing wealth on the condition of the poor, it appears that, although such an increase does not imply a proportionate increase of the funds for the maintenance of mere labour, yet it brings with it advantages to the lower classes of society which may fully counterbalance the disadvantages with which it is attended; and, strictly speaking, the good or bad condition of the poor is not *necessarily* connected with any particular stage in the progress of society to its full complement of wealth. A rapid increase of wealth indeed, whether it consists principally in additions to the means of subsistence or to the stock of conveniences and comforts, will always, *cæteris paribus*,

paribus, have a favourable effect on the poor; but the influence even of this cause is greatly modified and altered by other circumstances, and nothing but the union of individual prudence with the skill and industry which produce wealth can permanently secure to the lower classes of society that share of it which it is on every account so desirable that they should possess.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIV.

General Observations.

IT has been observed, that many countries at the period of their greatest degree of populousness have lived in the greatest plenty, and have been able to export corn; but at other periods, when their population was very low, have lived in continual poverty and want, and have been obliged to import corn. Egypt, Palestine, Rome, Sicily and Spain are cited as particular exemplifications of this fact; and it has been inferred that an increase of population in any state, not cultivated to the utmost, will tend rather to augment than diminish the relative plenty of the whole society: and that, as Lord Kaimes observes, a country cannot easily become too populous for agriculture; because agriculture has the signal property of producing food in

in proportion to the number of consumers [a].

The general facts, from which these inferences are drawn, there is no reason to doubt; but the inferences by no means follow from the premises. It is the nature of agriculture (as it has before been observed), particularly when well conducted, to produce support for a considerable number above that which it employs; and consequently if these members of the society, or, as Sir James Steuart calls them, the free hands, do not increase, so as to reach the limit of the number which can be supported by the surplus produce, the whole population of the country may continue for ages increasing with the improving state of agriculture, and yet always be able to export corn. But this increase, after a certain period, will be very different from the natural and unrestricted increase of population; it will merely follow the slow augmentation of produce from the gradual improvement of agriculture; and popula-

[a] Sketches of the History of Man, b. i. sketch i. p. 106, 107. 8vo. 1788.

tion

tion will still be checked by the difficulty of procuring subsistence. The precise measure of the population in a country thus circumstanced will not indeed be the quantity of food, because part of it is exported, but the quantity of employment. The state of this employment however will necessarily regulate the wages of labour, on which the power of the lower classes of people to procure food depends; and according as the employment of the country is increasing, whether slowly or rapidly, these wages will be such, as either to check or encourage early marriages; such, as to enable a labourer to support only two or three, or as many as five or six children.

In stating that in this, and all the other cases and systems which have been considered, the progress of population will be mainly regulated and limited by the real wages of labour, it is necessary to remark that practically the current wages of labour estimated in the necessaries of life do not always correctly represent the quantity of these necessaries which it is in the power of the lower classes to consume; and that sometimes

sometimes the error is in excess and sometimes in defect.

In a state of things when the prices of corn and of all sorts of commodities are rising, the money wages of labour do not always rise in proportion; but this apparent disadvantage to the labouring classes is sometimes more than counterbalanced by the plenty of employment, the quantity of task-work that can be obtained, and the opportunity given to women and children to add considerably to the earnings of the family. In this case, the power of the labouring classes to command the necessaries of life is much greater than is implied by the current rate of their wages, and will of course have a proportionably greater effect on the population.

On the other hand, when prices are generally falling, it often happens that the current rate of wages does not fall in proportion; but this apparent advantage is in the same manner often more than counterbalanced by the scarcity of work, and the impossibility of finding employment for all the members of a labourer's family who are able

able and willing to be industrious. In this case, the powers of the labouring classes to command the necessaries of life will evidently be less than is implied by the current rate of their wages.

In the same manner parish allowances distributed to families, the habitual practice of task-work, and the frequent employment of women and children, will affect population like a rise in the real wages of labour. And, on the other hand, the paying of every sort of labour by the day, the absence of employment for women and children, and the practice among labourers of not working more than three or four days in the week, either from inveterate indolence, or any other cause, will affect population like a low price of labour.

In all these cases the real earnings of the labouring classes throughout the year, estimated in food, are different from the apparent wages; but it will evidently be the average earnings of the families of the labouring classes throughout the year on which the encouragement to marriage, and the power of supporting children, will depend,

depend, and not merely the wages of day-labour estimated in food.

An attention to this very essential point will explain the reason why, in many instances, the progress of population does not appear to be regulated by what are usually called the real wages of labour; and why this progress may occasionally be greater, when the price of a day's labour will purchase rather less than the medium quantity of corn, than when it will purchase rather more.

In our own country, for instance, about the middle of the last century, the price of corn was very low; and, for twenty years together, from 1735 to 1755, a day's labour would, on an average, purchase a peck of wheat. During this period, population increased at a moderate rate; but not by any means with the same rapidity as from 1790 to 1811, when the average wages of day-labour would not in general purchase quite so much as a peck of wheat. In the latter case, however, there was a more rapid accumulation of capital, and a greater demand for labour; and though the continued rise of

of provisions still kept them rather ahead of wages, yet the fuller employment for every body that would work, the greater quantity of task-work done, the higher relative value of corn compared with manufactures, the increased use of potatoes, and the greater sums distributed in parish allowances, unquestionably gave to the lower classes of society the power of commanding a greater quantity of food, and will account for the more rapid increase of population in the latter period, in perfect consistency with the general principle.

On similar grounds, if, in some warm climates and rich soils, where corn is cheap, the quantity of food earned by a day's labour be such as to promise a more rapid progress in population than is really known to take place, the fact will be fully accounted for, if it be found that inveterate habits of indolence, fostered by a vicious government, and a slack demand for labour, prevent any thing like constant employment[a]. It would of course require high corn

[a] This observation is exemplified in the slow progress

corn wages of day-labour even to keep up the supply of a stationary population, where the days of working would only amount to half of the year.

In the case also of the prevalence of prudential habits, and a decided taste for the conveniences and comforts of life, as, according to the supposition, these habits and tastes do not operate as an encouragement to early marriages, and are not in fact spent almost entirely in the purchase of corn, it is quite consistent with the general principles laid down, that the population should not proceed at the same rate as is usual, *cæteris paribus*, in other countries, where the corn wages of labour are equally high.

The quantity of employment in any country will not of course vary from year to year, in the same manner as the quantity of produce must necessarily do, from the variation of the seasons; and consequently the check from want of employment will be much more steady in its operation, and

of population in some parts of the Spanish dominions in America, compared with its progress in the United States.

much

much more favourable to the lower classes of people, than the check from the immediate want of food. The first will be the preventive check; the second the positive check. When the demand for labour is either stationary, or increasing very slowly, people not seeing any employment open by which they can support a family, or the wages of common labour being inadequate to this purpose, will of course be deterred from marrying. But if a demand for labour continue increasing with some rapidity, although the supply of food be uncertain, on account of variable seasons and a dependence on other countries, the population will evidently go on, till it is positively checked by famine or the diseases arising from severe want.

Scarcity and extreme poverty therefore may or may not accompany an increasing population, according to circumstances: but they must necessarily accompany a permanently declining population; because there never has been, nor probably ever will be, any other cause than want of food, which makes the population of a

country permanently decline. In the numerous instances of depopulation which occur in history, the causes may always be traced to the want of industry or the ill direction of that industry, arising from violence, bad government, ignorance, &c., which first occasion a want of food, and of course depopulation follows. When Rome adopted the custom of importing all her corn, and laying all Italy into pasture, she soon declined in population. The causes of the depopulation of Egypt and Turkey have already been adverted to; and in the case of Spain, it was certainly not the numerical loss of people occasioned by the expulsion of the Moors, but the industry and capital thus expelled, which permanently injured her population. When a country has been depopulated by violent causes, if a bad government with its usual concomitant insecurity of property ensue, (which has generally been the case in all those countries which are now less peopled than formerly), neither the food nor the population can recover itself; and the inhabitants will probably live in severe want.

But

But when an accidental depopulation takes place, in a country which was before populous and industrious and in the habit of exporting corn, if the remaining inhabitants be left at liberty to exert, and do exert, their industry in the same direction as before, it is a strange idea to entertain, that they would then be unable to supply themselves with corn in the same plenty; particularly as the diminished numbers would of course cultivate principally the more fertile parts of their territory, and not be obliged, as in their more populous state, to apply to ungrateful soils. Countries in this situation would evidently have the same chance of recovering their former number, as they had originally of reaching this number; and indeed if absolute populousness were necessary to relative plenty, as some agriculturists have supposed[a], it would

[a] Among others, I allude more particularly to Mr. Anderson, who, in a *Calm Investigation into the Circumstances which have led to the present Scarcity of Grain in Britain* (published in 1801), has laboured with extraordinary earnestness, and I believe with the best intentions, to impress this curious truth on the minds of his countrymen.

would be impossible for new colonies to increase with the same rapidity as old states.

The prejudices on the subject of popu-

countrymen. The particular position which he attempts to prove is, *that an increase of population in any state, whose fields have not been made to attain their highest possible degree of productiveness (a thing that probably has never yet been seen on this globe), will necessarily have its means of subsistence rather augmented than diminished by that augmentation of its population; and the reverse.* The proposition is, to be sure, expressed rather obscurely; but from the context, his meaning evidently is, that every increase of population tends to increase relative plenty, and *vice versâ*. He concludes his proofs by observing that, if the facts which he has thus brought forward and connected do not serve to remove the fears of those, who doubt the possibility of this country producing abundance to sustain its increasing population (were it to augment in a ratio greatly more progressive than it has yet done), he should doubt whether they could be convinced of it, were one even to rise from the dead to tell them so. I agree with Mr. A. entirely, respecting the importanee of directing a greater part of the national industry to agriculture; but from the circumstance of its being possible for a country, with a certain direction of its industry, always to grow corn sufficient for its own supplies, although it may be very populous, he has been led into the strange error of supposing, that an agricultural country could support an unchecked population.

lation

lation bear a very striking resemblance to the old prejudices about specie; and we know how slowly and with what difficulty these last have yielded to juster conceptions. Politicians observing that states which were powerful and prosperous were almost invariably populous, have mistaken an effect for a cause, and have concluded, that their population was the cause of their prosperity, instead of their prosperity being the cause of their population; as the old political economists concluded that the abundance of specie was the cause of national wealth, instead of being the effect of it. The annual produce of the land and labour, in both these instances, became in consequence a secondary consideration; and its increase, it was conceived, would naturally follow the increase of specie in the one case, or of population in the other. The folly of endeavouring by forcible means to increase the quantity of specie in any country, and the absolute impossibility of accumulating it beyond a certain level by any human laws that can be devised, are now fully established, and have been completely

completely exemplified in the instances of Spain and Portugal. But the illusion still remains respecting population; and under this impression almost every political treatise has abounded in proposals to encourage population, with little or no comparative reference to the means of its support. Yet surely the folly of endeavouring to increase the quantity of specie in any country, without an increase of the commodities which it is to circulate, is not greater than that of endeavouring to increase the number of people, without an increase of the food which is to maintain them; and it will be found that the level, above which no human laws can raise the population of a country, is a limit more fixed and impassable than the limit to the accumulation of specie. However improbable in fact, it is possible to conceive that means might be invented of retaining a quantity of specie in a state, greatly beyond what was demanded by the produce of its land and labour and the relative state of other countries. But when by great encouragements population has been raised to such a height, that

that this produce is meted out to each individual in the smallest portions that can support life, no stretch of ingenuity can even conceive the possibility of going further.

It has appeared, I think, clearly, in the review of different societies given in the former part of this work, that those countries, the inhabitants of which were sunk in the most barbarous ignorance or oppressed by the most cruel tyranny, however low they might be in actual population, were very populous in proportion to their means of subsistence; and upon the slightest failure of the seasons generally suffered the severities of want. Ignorance and despotism seem to have no tendency to destroy the passion which prompts to increase; but they effectually destroy the checks to it from reason and foresight. The improvident barbarian who thinks only of his present wants, or the miserable peasant who, from his political situation, feels little security of reaping what he has sown, will seldom be deterred from gratifying his passions by the

the prospect of inconveniences, which cannot be expected to press on him under three or four years. But though this want of foresight, which is fostered by ignorance and despotism, tends thus rather to encourage the procreation of children, it is absolutely fatal to the industry which is to support them. Industry cannot exist without foresight and security. The indolence of the savage is well known; and the poor Egyptian or Abyssinian farmer without capital, who rents land which is let out yearly to the highest bidder, and who is constantly subject to the demands of his tyrannical masters, to the casual plunder of an enemy, and not unfrequently to the violation of his miserable contract, can have no heart to be industrious, and, if he had, could not exercise that industry with success. Even poverty itself, which appears to be the great spur to industry, when it has once passed certain limits, almost ceases to operate. The indigence which is hopeless destroys all vigorous exertion, and confines the efforts to what is sufficient for bare existence. It is the hope of bettering our condition,

condition, and the fear of want, rather than want itself, that is the best stimulus to industry; and its most constant and best directed efforts will almost invariably be found among a class of people above the class of the wretchedly poor.

The effect of ignorance and oppression will therefore always be to destroy the springs of industry, and consequently to diminish the annual produce of the land and labour in any country; and this diminution will inevitably be followed by a decrease of the population, in spite of the birth of any number of children whatever annually. The desire of immediate gratification, and the removal of the restraints to it from prudence, may perhaps, in such countries, prompt universally to early marriages; but when these habits have once reduced the people to the lowest possible state of poverty, they can evidently have no further effect upon the population. Their only effect must be on the degree of mortality; and there is no doubt, that, if we could obtain accurate bills of mortality in those southern countries, where very few women

women remain unmarried, and all marry young, the proportion of the annual deaths would be 1 in 17, 18, or 20, instead of 1 in 34, 36, or 40, as in European states where the preventive check operates.

That an increase of population, when it follows in its natural order, is both a great positive good in itself, and absolutely necessary to a further increase in the annual produce of the land and labour of any country, I should be the last to deny. The only question is, what is the order of its progress? In this point Sir James Steuart, who has in general explained this subject so well, appears to me to have fallen into an error. He determines, that multiplication is the efficient cause of agriculture, and not agriculture of multiplication [a]. But though it may be allowed, that the increase of people, beyond what could easily subsist on the natural fruits of the earth, first prompted man to till the ground; and that the view of maintaining a family, or of obtaining some valuable consideration in exchange for the products of agriculture,

[a] Polit. Econ. vol. i. b. i. c. xviii. p. 114.

still

still operates as the principal stimulus to cultivation; yet it is clear that these products, in their actual state, must be beyond the lowest wants of the existing population, before any permanent increase can possibly be supported. We know, that a multiplication of births has in numberless instances taken place, which has produced no effect upon agriculture, and has merely been followed by an increase of diseases; but perhaps there is no instance, where a permanent increase of agriculture has not effected a permanent increase of population somewhere or other. Consequently, agriculture may with more propriety be termed the efficient cause of population, than population of agriculture [a]; though they certainly re-act upon each other, and are mutually necessary to each other's support. This indeed seems to be the

[a] Sir James Steuart explains himself afterwards by saying, that he means principally the multiplication of those persons, who have some valuable consideration to give for the products of agriculture: but this is evidently not mere increase of population, and such an explanation seems to admit the incorrectness of the general proposition.

hinge

hinge on which the subject turns; and all the prejudices respecting population have, perhaps, arisen from a mistake about the order of precedence.

The author of *L'Ami des Hommes*, in a chapter on the effects of a decay of agriculture upon population, acknowledges that he had fallen into a fundamental error in considering population as the source of revenue; and that he was afterwards fully convinced that revenue was the source of population [a]. From a want of attention to this most important distinction, statesmen, in pursuit of the desirable object of population, have been led to encourage early marriages, to reward the fathers of families, and to disgrace celibacy; but this, as the same author justly observes, is to dress and water a piece of land without sowing it, and yet to expect a crop.

What is here said of the order of precedence with respect to agriculture and population, does not invalidate what was said in an earlier part of this work on the tendency to an oscillation or alternation in the

[a] Tom. viii. p. 84, 12mo. 9 vols. 1762.

increase

increase of population and food in the natural course of their progress. In this progress nothing is more usual than for the population to increase at certain periods faster than food; indeed it is a part of the general principle that it should do so; and when the money wages of labour are prevented from falling by the employment of the increasing population in manufactures, the rise in the price of corn which the increased competition for it occasions is practically the most natural and frequent stimulus to agriculture. But then it must be recollected that the great relative increase of population absolutely implies a previous increase of food at some time or other greater than the lowest wants of the people. Without this, the population could not possibly have gone forward *.

* According to the principle of population, the human race has a tendency to increase faster than food. It has therefore a constant tendency to people a country fully up to the limits of subsistence, but by the laws of nature it can never go beyond them, meaning, of course, by these limits, the lowest quantity of food which will maintain a stationary population. Population, therefore, can never, strictly speaking, precede food.

Universally,

Universally, when the population of a country is for a longer or shorter time stationary, owing to the low corn wages of labour, a case which is not unfrequent, it is obvious that nothing but a previous increase of food, or at least an increase of the portion awarded to the labourer, can enable the population again to proceed forwards.

And, in the same manner, with a view to any essential improvement in the condition of the labourer, which is to give him a greater effective command over the means of comfortable subsistence, it is absolutely necessary that, setting out from the lowest point, the increase of food must precede and be greater than the increase of population.

Strictly speaking then, as man cannot live without food, there can be no doubt that in the order of precedence food must take the lead; although when, from the state of cultivation and other causes, the average quantity of food awarded to the labourer is considerably more than sufficient to maintain a stationary population, it is quite

quite natural that the diminution of this quantity, from the tendency of population to increase, should be one of the most powerful and constant stimulants to agriculture.

It is worthy also of remark that on this account a stimulus to the increase of agriculture is much more easy when, from the prevalence of prudential restraint, or any other cause, the labourer is well paid; as in this case a rise in the price of corn, occasioned either by the increase of population or a foreign demand, will increase for a time the profits of the farmer, and often enable him to make permanent improvements; whereas, when the labourer is paid so scantily that his wages will not allow even of any temporary diminution without a diminution of population, the increase of cultivation and population must from the first be accompanied with a fall of profits. The prevalence of the preventive check to population and the good average wages of the labourer will rather promote than prevent that occasional increase and decrease of them, which as a stimulus seems to be

favourable to the increase both of food and population.

Among the other prejudices which have prevailed on the subject of population, it has been generally thought that, while there is either waste among the rich or land remaining uncultivated in any country, the complaints for want of food cannot be justly founded; or at least that the pressure of distress upon the poor is to be attributed to the ill conduct of the higher classes of society and the bad management of the land. The real effect however of these two circumstances is merely to narrow the limit of the actual population; but they have little or no influence on what may be called the average pressure of distress on the poorer members of society. If our ancestors had been so frugal and industrious, and had transmitted such habits to their posterity, that nothing superfluous was now consumed by the higher classes, no horses were used for pleasure, and no land was left uncultivated, a striking difference would appear in the state of the actual population; but probably none whatever in the state of the lower

lower classes of people, with respect to the price of labour, and the facility of supporting a family. The waste among the rich, and the horses kept for pleasure, have indeed a little the effect of the consumption of grain in distilleries, noticed before with regard to China. On the supposition, that the food consumed in this manner may be withdrawn on the occasion of a scarcity, and be applied to the relief of the poor, they operate certainly, as far as they go, like granaries, which are only opened at the time that they are most wanted, and must therefore tend rather to benefit than to injure the lower classes of society.

With regard to uncultivated land, it is evident that its effect upon the poor is neither to injure nor to benefit them. The sudden cultivation of it will indeed tend to improve their condition for a time, and the neglect of lands before cultivated will certainly make their situation worse for a certain period; but when no changes of this kind are going forward, the effect of uncultivated land on the lower classes operates merely like the possession of a smaller terri-

tory. It may indeed be a point of some importance to the poor, whether a country be in the habit of exporting or importing corn; but this point is not necessarily connected with the complete or incomplete cultivation of the whole territory, but depends upon the proportion of the surplus produce to those who are supported by it; and in fact this proportion is generally the greatest, in countries which have not yet completed the cultivation of all their territory. If every inch of land in this country were well cultivated, there would be no reason to expect, merely from this circumstance, that we should be able to export corn. Our power in this respect would depend entirely on the proportion of the surplus produce to the commercial population; and this of course would in its turn depend on the direction of capital to agriculture or commerce.

It is not probable that any country with a large territory should ever be completely cultivated; and I am inclined to think that we often draw very inconsiderate conclusions against the industry and government of states from the appearance of uncultivated

cultivated lands in them. It seems to be the clear and express duty of every government to remove all obstacles and give every facility to the enclosure and cultivation of land; but when this has been done, the rest must be left to the operation of individual interest; and upon this principle it cannot be expected that any new land should be brought into cultivation, the manure and the labour necessary for which might be employed to greater advantage on the improvement of land already in cultivation; and this is a case which will very frequently occur. In countries possessed of a large territory, there will always be a great quantity of land of a middling quality, which requires constant dressing to prevent it from growing worse, but which would admit of very great improvement, if a greater quantity of manure and labour could be employed upon it. The great obstacle to the melioration of land is the difficulty, the expence, and sometimes the impossibility, of procuring a sufficient quantity of dressing. As this instrument of improvement, therefore, is in practice limited,

limited, whatever it may be in theory, the question will always be, how it may be most profitably employed? And in any instance, where a certain quantity of dressing and labour, employed to bring new land into cultivation, would have yielded a permanently greater produce, if employed upon old land, both the individual and the nation are losers. Upon this principle, it is not uncommon for farmers in some situations never to dress their poorest land, but to get from it merely a scanty crop every three or four years, and to employ the whole of their manure, which they practically feel is limited, on those parts of their farms where it will produce a greater proportional effect.

The case will be different, of course, in a small territory with a great population, supported on funds not derived from their own soil. In this case there will be little or no choice of land, and a comparative superabundance of manure; and under such circumstances the poorest soils may be brought under cultivation. But for this purpose, it is not mere population that is wanted, but a

population

population which can obtain the produce of other countries, while it is gradually improving its own; otherwise it would be immediately reduced in proportion to the limited produce of this small and barren territory; and the melioration of the land might perhaps never take place; or, if it did, it would take place very slowly indeed, and the population would always be exactly measured by this tardy rate, and could not possibly increase beyond it.

This subject is illustrated in the cultivation of the Campine in Brabant, which, according to the Abbé Mann [a], consisted originally of the most barren and arid sand. Many attempts were made by private individuals to bring it under cultivation, but without success; which proves, that, as a farming project, and considered as a sole dependence, the cultivation of it would not answer. Some religious houses, however, at last settled there; and being supported by other funds, and improving the land

[a] Memoir on the Agriculture of the Netherlands, published in vol. i. of Communications to the Board of Agriculture, p. 225.

merely

merely as a secondary object, they by degrees, in the course of some centuries, brought nearly the whole under cultivation, letting it out to farmers as soon as it was sufficiently improved.

There is no spot, however barren, which might not be made rich this way, or by the concentrated population of a manufacturing town; but this is no proof whatever that, with respect to population and food, population has the precedence; because this concentrated population could not possibly exist without the preceding existence of an adequate quantity of food in the surplus produce of some other district.

In a country like Brabant or Holland, where territory is the principal want, and not manure, such a district as the Campine is described to be may perhaps be cultivated with advantage. But in countries possessed of a large territory, and with a considerable quantity of land of a middling quality, the attempt to cultivate such a spot would be a palpable misdirection and waste both of individual and national resources.

The

The French have already found their error in bringing under cultivation too great a quantity of poor land. They are now sensible, that they have employed in this way a portion of labour and dressing, which would have produced a permanently better effect, if it had been applied to the further improvement of better land. Even in China, which is so fully cultivated and so fully peopled, barren heaths have been noticed in some districts; which proves that, distressed as the people appear to be for subsistence, it does not answer to them to employ any of their manure on such spots. These remarks will be still further confirmed, if we recollect that, in the cultivation of a large surface of bad land, there must necessarily be a great waste of seed corn.

We should not therefore be too ready to make inferences against the internal economy of a country from the appearance of uncultivated heaths, without other evidence. But the fact is, that, as no country has ever reached, or probably ever will reach, its highest possible acme of produce, it appears

pears always as if the want of industry, or the ill direction of that industry, was the actual limit to a further increase of produce and population, and not the absolute refusal of nature to yield any more: but a man who is locked up in a room may be fairly said to be confined by the walls of it, though he may never touch them; and with regard to the principle of population, it is never the question whether a country will produce *any more*, but whether it may be made to produce a sufficiency to keep pace with a nearly unchecked increase of people. In China, the question is not, whether a certain additional quantity of rice might be raised by improved culture; but whether such an addition could be expected during the next twenty-five years, as would be sufficient to support an additional three hundred millions of people. And in this country, it is not the question whether by cultivating all our commons we could raise considerably more corn than at present; but whether we could raise sufficient for a population of twenty millions in the next twenty-five years,

years, and forty millions in the next fifty years [a].

The

[a] It may be thought that the effects here referred to as resulting from greatly increased resources, could not take place in a country where there were towns and manufactories; and that they are not quite consistent with what was said in a former part of this work, namely, that the ultimate check to population (the want of food) is never the immediate check, except in cases of actual famine.

If the expressions are unguardedly strong, they will certainly allow of considerable mitigation, without any sensible diminution in the practical force and application of the argument. But I am inclined to think that, though they are unquestionably strong, they are not very far from the truth. The great cause which fills towns and manufactories is an insufficiency of employment, and consequently of the means of support in the country; and if each labourer, in the parish where he was born, could command food, clothing, and lodging for ten children, the population of the towns would soon bear but a small proportion to the population in the country. And if to this consideration we add that, in the case supposed, the proportion of births and marriages in towns would be greatly increased, and all the mortality arising from poverty almost entirely removed, I should by no means be surprised (after a short interval for the change of habits) at an increase of population, even in China, equal to that which is referred to in the text.

With regard to this country, as it is positively known that

The allowing of the produce of the earth to be absolutely unlimited, scarcely removes the weight of a hair from the argument, which depends entirely upon the

that the rate of increase has changed from that which would double the population in 120 years, or more, to that which would double it in 55 years, under a great increase of towns and manufactures, I feel very little doubt that, if the resources of the country were so augmented and distributed, as that every man could marry at 18 or 20, with a certainty of being able to support the largest family, the population of the British Isles would go on increasing at a rate which would double the population in 25 years. It appears, from our registers, that England is a healthier country than America. At the time that America was increasing with extraordinary rapidity, in some of her towns the deaths exceeded the births. In the English towns, with their present improvements, I do not think this would ever be the case, if all the lower classes could marry as soon as they pleased, and there was little or no premature mortality from the consequences of poverty.

But whether the habits and customs of an old state could be so changed by an abundance of food, as to make it increase nearly like a new colony, is a question of mere curiosity. The argument only requires that a change from scanty to abundant means of supporting a family should occasion, in old states, a marked increase of population; and this it is conceived cannot possibly be denied.

differently

differently increasing ratios of population and food: and all that the most enlightened governments and the most persevering and best guided efforts of industry can do is to make the necessary checks to population operate more equably, and in a direction to produce the least evil; but to remove them is a task absolutely hopeless.

ESSAY,

ESSAY,

&c. &c.

BOOK IV.

OF OUR FUTURE PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE REMOVAL OR MITIGATION OF THE EVILS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

CHAP. I.

Of moral Restraint, and our Obligation to practise this Virtue.

AS it appears that, in the actual state of every society which has come within our review, the natural progress of population has been constantly and powerfully checked; and as it seems evident that no improved form of government, no plans of emigration, no benevolent institutions, and no degree or direction of national industry, can

can prevent the continued action of a great check to population in some form or other; it follows that we must submit to it as an inevitable law of nature; and the only inquiry that remains is, how it may take place with the least possible prejudice to the virtue and happiness of human society. All the immediate checks to population, which have been observed to prevail in the same and different countries, seem to be resolvable into moral restraint, vice and misery; and if our choice be confined to these three, we cannot long hesitate in our decision respecting which it would be most eligible to encourage.

In the first edition of this essay I observed, that as from the laws of nature it appeared, that some check to population must exist, it was better that this check should arise from a foresight of the difficulties attending a family and the fear of dependent poverty, than from the actual presence of want and sickness. This idea will admit of being pursued further; and I am inclined to think that, from the prevailing opinions respecting population, which undoubtedly

doubtedly originated in barbarous ages, and have been continued and circulated by that part of every community which may be supposed to be interested in their support, we have been prevented from attending to the clear dictates of reason and nature on this subject.

Natural and moral evil seem to be the instruments employed by the Deity in admonishing us to avoid any mode of conduct, which is not suited to our being, and will consequently injure our happiness. If we are intemperate in eating and drinking, our health is disordered; if we indulge the transports of anger, we seldom fail to commit acts of which we afterwards repent; if we multiply too fast, we die miserably of poverty and contagious diseases. The laws of nature in all these cases are similar and uniform. They indicate to us that we have followed these impulses too far, so as to trench upon some other law, which equally demands attention. The uneasiness we feel from repletion, the injuries that we inflict on ourselves or others in anger, and the inconveniences we suffer on the approach of po-

verty, are all admonitions to us to regulate these impulses better; and if we heed not this admonition, we justly incur the penalty of our disobedience, and our sufferings operate as a warning to others.

From the inattention of mankind hitherto to the consequences of increasing too fast, it must be presumed, that these consequences are not so immediately and powerfully connected with the conduct which leads to them, as in the other instances; but the delayed knowledge of particular effects does not alter their nature, or our obligation to regulate our conduct accordingly, as soon as we are satisfied of what this conduct ought to be. In many other instances it has not been till after long and painful experience, that the conduct most favourable to the happiness of man has been forced upon his attention. The kind of food, and the mode of preparing it, best suited to the purposes of nutrition and the gratification of the palate; the treatment and remedies of different disorders; the bad effects on the human frame of low and marshy situations; the invention of the most convenient

convenient and comfortable clothing; the construction of good houses; and all the advantages and extended enjoyments, which distinguish civilized life, were not pointed out to the attention of man at once; but were the slow and late result of experience, and of the admonitions received by repeated failures.

Diseases have been generally considered as the inevitable inflictions of Providence; but perhaps a great part of them may more justly be considered as indications that we have offended against some of the laws of nature. The plague at Constantinople, and in other towns of the East, is a constant admonition of this kind to the inhabitants. The human constitution cannot support such a state of filth and torpor; and as dirt, squalid poverty and indolence are in the highest degree unfavourable to happiness and virtue, it seems a benevolent dispensation, that such a state should by the laws of nature produce disease and death, as a beacon to others to avoid splitting on the same rock.

The prevalence of the plague in London

till the year 1666 operated in a proper manner on the conduct of our ancestors; and the removal of nuisances, the construction of drains, the widening of the streets and the giving more room and air to their houses, had the effect of eradicating completely this dreadful disorder, and of adding greatly to the health and happiness of the inhabitants.

In the history of every epidemic it has almost invariably been observed that the lower classes of people, whose food was poor and insufficient, and who lived crowded together in small and dirty houses, were the principal victims. In what other manner can Nature point out to us that, if we increase too fast for the means of subsistence, so as to render it necessary for a considerable part of the society to live in this miserable manner, we have offended against one of her laws? This law she has declared exactly in the same manner as she declares that intemperance in eating and drinking will be followed by ill health; and that, however grateful it may be to us at the moment to indulge these passions to excess, this

this indulgence will ultimately produce unhappiness. It is as much a law of nature that repletion is bad for the human frame, as that eating and drinking, unattended with this consequence, are good for it.

An implicit obedience to the impulses of our natural passions would lead us into the wildest and most fatal extravagancies; and yet we have the strongest reasons for believing that all these passions are so necessary to our being, that they could not be generally weakened or diminished, without injuring our happiness. The most powerful and universal of all our desires is the desire of food, and of those things, such as clothing, houses, &c., which are immediately necessary to relieve us from the pains of hunger and cold. It is acknowledged by all, that these desires put in motion the greatest part of that activity, from which the multiplied improvements and advantages of civilized life are derived; and that the pursuit of these objects, and the gratification of these desires, form the principal happiness of the larger half of mankind, civilized or uncivilized, and are indispensably

indispensably necessary to the more refined enjoyments of the other half. We are all conscious of the inestimable benefits that we derive from these desires, when directed in a certain manner; but we are equally conscious of the evils resulting from them, when not directed in this manner; so much so, that society has taken upon itself to punish most severely what it considers as an irregular gratification of them. And yet the desires in both cases are equally natural, and, abstractedly considered, equally virtuous. The act of the hungry man who satisfies his appetite by taking a loaf from the shelf of another, is in no respect to be distinguished from the act of him who does the same thing with a loaf of his own, but by its consequences. From the consideration of these consequences, we feel the most perfect conviction, that, if people were not prevented from gratifying their natural desires with the loaves in the possession of others, the number of loaves would universally diminish. This experience is the foundation of the laws relating to property, and of the distinctions of virtue and vice,

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in the gratification of desires otherwise perfectly the same.

If the pleasure arising from the gratification of these propensities were universally diminished in vividness, violations of property would become less frequent; but this advantage would be greatly overbalanced by the narrowing of the sources of enjoyment. The diminution in the quantity of all those productions, which contribute to human gratification, would be much greater in proportion than the diminution of thefts; and the loss of general happiness on the one side would be beyond comparison greater than the gain of happiness on the other. When we contemplate the constant and severe toils of the greatest part of mankind, it is impossible not to be forcibly impressed with the reflection, that the sources of human happiness would be most cruelly diminished, if the prospect of a good meal, a warm house and a comfortable fireside in the evening, were not incitements sufficiently vivid, to give interest and cheerfulness to the labours and privations of the day.

After

After the desire of food, the most powerful and general of our desires is the passion between the sexes, taken in an enlarged sense. Of the happiness spread over human life by this passion very few are unconscious. Virtuous love, exalted by friendship, seems to be that sort of mixture of sensual and intellectual enjoyment, particularly suited to the nature of man, and most powerfully calculated to awaken the sympathies of the soul and produce the most exquisite gratifications. Perhaps there is scarcely a man, who has once experienced the genuine delight of virtuous love, however great his intellectual pleasures may have been, who does not look back to that period as the sunny spot in his whole life, where his imagination loves most to bask, which he recollects and contemplates with the fondest regret, and which he would most wish to live over again.

It has been said by Mr. Godwin, in order to shew the evident inferiority of the pleasures of sense, "Strip the commerce of the "sexes of all its attendant circumstances, "and it would be generally despised." He

He might as well say to a man who admired trees, strip them of their spreading branches and lovely foliage, and what beauty can you see in a bare pole? But it was the tree with the branches and foliage, and not without them, that excited admiration. It is "the symmetry of person, "the vivacity, the voluptuous softness of "temper, the affectionate kindness of "feeling, the imagination and the wit*" of a woman, which excite the passion of love, and not the mere distinction of her being a female.

It is a very great mistake to suppose that the passion between the sexes only operates and influences human conduct, when the immediate gratification of it is in contemplation. The formation and steady pursuit of some particular plan of life has been justly considered as one of the most permanent sources of happiness; but I am inclined to believe, that there are not many of these plans formed, which are not connected in a considerable degree with the prospect of the gratification of this passion,

* Political Justice, vol. i. b. i. c. v. p. 72, 8vo.

and

and with the support of children arising from it. The evening meal, the warm house, and the comfortable fireside, would lose half of their interest, if we were to exclude the idea of some object of affection, with whom they were to be shared.

We have also great reason to believe that the passion between the sexes has the most powerful tendency to soften and meliorate the human character, and keep it more alive to all the kindlier emotions of benevolence and pity. Observations on savage life have generally tended to prove that nations, in which this passion appeared to be less vivid, were distinguished by a ferocious and malignant spirit, and particularly by tyranny and cruelty to the sex. If indeed this bond of conjugal affection were considerably weakened, it seems probable, either that the man would make use of his superior physical strength, and turn his wife into a slave, as among the generality of savages; or at best, that every little inequality of temper, which must necessarily occur between two persons, would produce a total

a total alienation of affection; and this could hardly take place, without a diminution of parental fondness and care, which would have the most fatal effect on the happiness of society.

It may be further remarked, and observations on the human character in different countries warrant us in the conclusion, that the passion is stronger, and its general effects in producing gentleness, kindness and suavity of manners, much more powerful, where obstacles are thrown in the way of very early and universal gratification. In some of the southern countries, where every impulse may be almost immediately indulged, the passion sinks into mere animal desire, is soon weakened and almost extinguished by excess, and its influence on the character is extremely confined. But in European countries, where, though the women are not secluded, yet manners have imposed considerable restraints on this gratification, the passion not only rises in force, but in the universality and beneficial tendency of its effects; and has often the greatest

greatest influence in the formation and improvement of the character, where it is the least gratified.

Considering then the passion between the sexes in all its bearings and relations, and including the endearing engagement of parent and child resulting from it, few will be disposed to deny that it is one of the principal ingredients of human happiness. Yet experience teaches us that much evil flows from the irregular gratification of it; and though the evil be of little weight in the scale, when compared with the good, yet its absolute quantity cannot be inconsiderable, on account of the strength and universality of the passion. It is evident however, from the general conduct of all governments in their distribution of punishments, that the evil resulting from this cause is not so great and so immediately dangerous to society, as the irregular gratification of the desire of property; but placing this evil in the most formidable point of view, we should evidently purchase a diminution of it at a very high price, by the extinction or diminution of the passion which

which causes it; a change, which would probably convert human life either into a cold and cheerless blank, or a scene of savage and merciless ferocity.

A careful attention to the remote as well as immediate effects of all the human passions, and all the general laws of nature, leads us strongly to the conclusion, that, under the present constitution of things, few or none of them would admit of being greatly diminished, without narrowing the sources of good, more powerfully than the sources of evil. And the reason seems to be obvious. They are, in fact, the materials of all our pleasures, as well as of all our pains; of all our happiness, as well as of all our misery; of all our virtues, as well as of all our vices. It must therefore be regulation and direction that are wanted, not diminution or extinction.

It is justly observed by Paley, that "Human passions are either necessary to "human welfare, or capable of being made, "and in a great majority of instances are "in fact made, conducive to its happiness. "These passions are strong and general; "and

" and perhaps would not answer their pur-
" pose, unless they were so. But strength
" and generality, when it is expedient that
" particular circumstances should be re-
" spected, become, if left to themselves,
" excess and misdirection. From which
" excess and misdirection the vices of man-
" kind (the causes no doubt of much mi-
" sery) appear to spring. This account,
" while it shews us the principle of vice,
" shews us at the same time the province
" of reason and self-government *."

Our virtue, therefore, as reasonable beings, evidently consists in educing from the general materials, which the Creator has placed under our guidance, the greatest sum of human happiness; and as natural impulses are abstractedly considered good, and only to be distinguished by their consequences, a strict attention to these consequences, and the regulation of our conduct conformably to them, must be considered as our principal duty.

The fecundity of the human species is, in some respects, a distinct consideration

* Natural Theology, c. xxvi. p. 547.

from

from the passion between the sexes, as it evidently depends more upon the power of women in bearing children, than upon the strength or weakness of this passion. It is however a law exactly similar in its great features to all the other laws of nature. It is strong and general, and apparently would not admit of any very considerable diminution, without being inadequate to its object; the evils arising from it are incidental to these necessary qualities of strength and generality; and these evils are capable of being very greatly mitigated and rendered comparatively light by human energy and virtue. We cannot but conceive that it is an object of the Creator, that the earth should be replenished; and it appears to me clear that this could not be effected without a tendency in population to increase faster than food; and as with the present law of increase, the peopling of the earth does not proceed very rapidly, we have undoubtedly some reason to believe, that this law is not too powerful for its apparent object. The desire of the means of subsistence would be comparatively confined

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in its effects, and would fail of producing that general activity so necessary to the improvement of the human faculties, were it not for the strong and universal effort of population to increase with greater rapidity than its supplies. If these two tendencies were exactly balanced, I do not see what motive there would be sufficiently strong to overcome the acknowledged indolence of man, and make him proceed in the cultivation of the soil. The population of any large territory, however fertile, would be as likely to stop at five hundred, or five thousand, as at five millions, or fifty millions. Such a balance therefore would clearly defeat one great purpose of creation; and if the question be merely a question of degree, a question of a little more or a little less strength, we may fairly distrust our competence to judge of the precise quantity necessary to answer the object with the smallest sum of incidental evil. In the present state of things we appear to have under our guidance a great power, capable of peopling a desert region in a small number of years; and yet, under other circumstances,

cumstances, capable of being confined by human energy and virtue to any limits however narrow, at the expence of a small comparative quantity of evil. The analogy of all the other laws of nature would be completely violated, if in this instance alone there were no provision for accidental failures, no resources against the vices of mankind, or the partial mischiefs resulting from other general laws. To effect the apparent object without any attendant evil, it is evident that a perpetual change in the law of increase would be necessary, varying with the varying circumstances of each country. But instead of this, it is not only more consonant to the analogy of the other parts of nature, but we have reason to think that it is more conducive to the formation and improvement of the human mind, that the law should be uniform, and the evils incidental to it, under certain circumstances, left to be mitigated or removed by man himself. His duties in this case vary with his situation; he is thus kept more alive to the consequences of his actions; and his faculties have evidently

greater play and opportunity of improvement, than if the evil were removed by a perpetual change of the law according to circumstances.

Even if from passions too easily subdued, or the facility of illicit intercourse, a state of celibacy were a matter of indifference, and not a state of some privation, the end of nature in the peopling of the earth would be apparently liable to be defeated. It is of the very utmost importance to the happiness of mankind, that population should not increase too fast; but it does not appear, that the object to be accomplished would admit of any considerable diminution in the desire of marriage. It is clearly the duty of each individual not to marry till he has a prospect of supporting his children; but it is at the same time to be wished that he should retain undiminished his desire of marriage, in order that he may exert himself to realize this prospect, and be stimulated to make provision for the support of greater numbers.

It is evidently therefore regulation and direction which are required with regard to the principle

principle of population, not diminution or alteration. And if moral restraint be the only virtuous mode of avoiding the incidental evils arising from this principle, our obligation to practise it will evidently rest exactly upon the same foundation as our obligation to practise any of the other virtues.

Whatever indulgence we may be disposed to allow to occasional failures in the discharge of a duty of acknowledged difficulty, yet of the strict line of duty we cannot doubt. Our obligation not to marry till we have a fair prospect of being able to support our children will appear to deserve the attention of the moralist, if it can be proved that an attention to this obligation is of most powerful effect in the prevention of misery; and that, if it were the general custom to follow the first impulse of nature, and marry at the age of puberty, the universal prevalence of every known virtue in the greatest conceivable degree would fail of rescuing society from the most wretched and desperate state of want, and all the diseases and famines which usually accompany it.

CHAP. II.

Of the Effects which would result to Society from the Prevalence of moral Restraint.

ONE of the principal reasons which have prevented an assent to the doctrine of the constant tendency of population to increase beyond the means of subsistence, is a great unwillingness to believe that the Deity would by the laws of nature bring beings into existence, which by the laws of nature could not be supported in that existence. But if, in addition to that general activity and direction of our industry put in motion by these laws, we further consider that the incidental evils arising from them are constantly directing our attention to the proper check to population, moral restraint; and if it appear that, by a strict obedience to the duties pointed out to us by the light of nature and reason, and confirmed and sanctioned by revelation, these evils may be

be avoided; the objection will, I trust, be removed, and all apparent imputation on the goodness of the Deity be done away.

The heathen moralists never represented happiness as attainable on earth, but through the medium of virtue; and among their virtues prudence ranked in the first class, and by some was even considered as including every other. The Christian religion places our present as well as future happiness in the exercise of those virtues, which tend to fit us for a state of superior enjoyment; and the subjection of the passions to the guidance of reason, which, if not the whole, is a principal branch of prudence, is in consequence most particularly inculcated.

If, for the sake of illustration, we might be permitted to draw a picture of society, in which each individual endeavoured to attain happiness by the strict fulfilment of those duties, which the most enlightened of the ancient philosophers deduced from the laws of nature, and which have been directly taught, and received such powerful sanctions in the moral code of Christianity, it would

would present a very different scene from that which we now contemplate. Every act, which was prompted by the desire of immediate gratification, but which threatened an ultimate overbalance of pain, would be considered as a breach of duty; and consequently no man, whose earnings were only sufficient to maintain two children, would put himself in a situation in which he might have to maintain four or five, however he might be prompted to it by the passion of love. This prudential restraint, if it were generally adopted, by narrowing the supply of labour in the market, would, in the natural course of things, soon raise its price. The period of delayed gratification would be passed in saving the earnings which were above the wants of a single man, and in acquiring habits of sobriety, industry and economy, which would enable him in a few years to enter into the matrimonial contract without fear of its consequences. The operation of the preventive check in this way, by constantly keeping the population within the limits of the food, though constantly following its increase, would give a real

a real value to the rise of wages; and the sums saved by labourers before marriage, very different from those forced advances in the price of labour or arbitrary parochial donations, which, in proportion to their magnitude and extensiveness, must of necessity be followed by a proportional advance in the price of provisions. As the wages of labour would thus be sufficient to maintain with decency a large family, and as every married couple would set out with a sum for contingencies, all abject poverty would be removed from society; or would at least be confined to a very few, who had fallen into misfortunes, against which no prudence or foresight could provide.

The interval between the age of puberty and the period at which each individual might venture on marriage must, according to the supposition, be passed in strict chastity; because the law of chastity cannot be violated without producing evil. The effect of any thing like a promiscuous intercourse, which prevents the birth of children, is evidently to weaken the best affections of the heart, and in a very marked manner to degrade

degrade the female character. And any other intercourse would, without improper arts, bring as many children into the society as marriage, with a much greater probability of their becoming a burden to it.

These considerations shew that the virtue of chastity is not, as some have supposed, a forced produce of artificial society; but that it has the most real and solid foundation in nature and reason; being apparently the only virtuous mean of avoiding the vice and misery which result so often from the principle of population.

In such a society as we have been supposing, it might be necessary for some of both sexes to pass many of the early years of life in the single state; and if this were general, there would certainly be room for a much greater number to marry afterwards, so that fewer, upon the whole, would be condemned to pass their lives in celibacy. If the custom of not marrying early prevailed generally, and if violations of chastity were equally dishonourable in both sexes, a more familiar and friendly intercourse between them might take place without danger.

danger. Two young people might converse together intimately without its being immediately supposed that they either intended marriage or intrigue; and a much better opportunity would thus be given to both sexes of finding out kindred dispositions, and of forming those strong and lasting attachments, without which the married state is generally more productive of misery than of happiness. The earlier years of life would not be spent without love, though without the full gratification of it. The passion, instead of being extinguished, as it now too frequently is, by early sensuality, would only be repressed for a time, that it might afterwards burn with a brighter, purer and steadier flame; and the happiness of the married state, instead of only affording the means of immediate indulgence, would be looked forward to as the prize of industry and virtue, and the reward of a genuine and constant attachment [a].

The

[a] Dr. Currie, in his interesting observations on the character and condition of the Scotch peasantry, prefixed to his Life of Burns, remarks, with a just knowledge of human

The passion of love is a powerful stimulus in the formation of character, and often prompts to the most noble and generous exertions; but this is only when the affections are centred in one object, and generally when full gratification is delayed by difficulties[a]. The heart is perhaps

human nature, that, "in appreciating the happiness and "virtue of a community, there is perhaps no single crite-"rion on which so much dependence may be placed as "the state of the intercourse between the sexes. Where "this displays ardour of attachment, accompanied by "purity of conduct, the character and the influence of "women rise, our imperfect nature mounts in the scale "of moral excellence; and from the source of this single "affection, a stream of felicity descends, which branches "into a thousand rivulets that enrich and adorn the field "of life. Where the attachment between the sexes sinks "into an appetite, the heritage of our species is compa-"ratively poor, and man approaches to the condition of "the brutes that perish." Vol. i. p. 18.

[a] Dr. Currie observes, that the Scottish peasant in the course of his passion often exerts a spirit of adventure, of which a Spanish cavalier need not be ashamed. Burns' Works, vol. i. p. 16.—It is not to be doubted that this kind of romantic passion, which, Dr. C. says, characterizes the attachment of the humblest people of Scotland, and which has been greatly fostered by the elevation of mind given to them by a superior education, has had a most powerful and most beneficial influence on the national character.

never

never so much disposed to virtuous conduct, and certainly at no time is the virtue of chastity so little difficult to men, as when under the influence of such a passion. Late marriages taking place in this way would be very different from those of the same name at present, where the union is too frequently prompted solely by interested views, and the parties meet, not unfrequently, with exhausted constitutions, and generally with exhausted affections. The late marriages at present are indeed principally confined to the men; of whom there are few, however advanced in life, who, if they determine to marry, do not fix their choice on a young wife. A young woman without fortune, when she has passed her twenty-fifth year, begins to fear, and with reason, that she may lead a life of celibacy; and with a heart capable of forming a strong attachment, feels, as each year creeps on, her hopes of finding an object on which to rest her affections gradually diminishing, and the uneasiness of her situation aggravated by the silly and unjust prejudices of the world. If the general age of marriage

riage among women were later, the period of youth and hope would be prolonged, and fewer would be ultimately disappointed.

That a change of this kind would be a most decided advantage to the more virtuous half of society, we cannot for a moment doubt. However impatiently the privation might be borne by the men, it would be supported by the women readily and cheerfully; and if they could look forwards with just confidence to marriage at twenty-seven or twenty-eight, I fully believe, that, if the matter were left to their free choice, they would clearly prefer waiting till this period, to the being involved in all the cares of a large family at twenty-five. The most eligible age of marriage however could not be fixed; but must depend entirely on circumstances and situation. There is no period of human life, at which nature more strongly prompts to an union of the sexes, than from seventeen or eighteen to twenty. In every society above that state of depression, which almost excludes reason and foresight, these early tendencies must necessarily be restrained; and if, in the actual

tual state of things, such a restraint on the impulses of nature be found unavoidable, at what time can we be consistently released from it, but at that period, whatever it may be, when, in the existing circumstances of the society, a fair prospect presents itself of maintaining a family?

The difficulty of moral restraint will perhaps be objected to this doctrine. To him who does not acknowledge the authority of the Christian religion, I have only to say that, after the most careful investigation, this virtue appears to be absolutely necessary, in order to avoid certain evils which would otherwise result from the general laws of nature. According to his own principles, it is his duty to pursue the greatest good consistent with these laws; and not to fail in this important end, and produce an overbalance of misery by a partial obedience to some of the dictates of nature, while he neglects others. The path of virtue, though it be the only path which leads to permanent happiness, has always been represented by the heathen moralists as of difficult ascent.

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To the Christian I would say that the Scriptures most clearly and precisely point it out to us as our duty, to restrain our passions within the bounds of reason; and it is a palpable disobedinece of this law to indulge our desires in such a manner as reason tells us will unavoidably end in misery. The Christian cannot consider the difficulty of moral restraint as any argument against its being his duty; since, in almost every page of the sacred writings, man is described as encompassed on all sides by temptations which it is extremely difficult to resist; and though no duties are enjoined, which do not contribute to his happiness on earth as well as in a future state, yet an undeviating obedience is never represented as an easy task.

There is in general so strong a tendency to love in early youth, that it is extremely difficult at this period to distinguish a genuine from a transient passion. If the earlier years of life were passed by both sexes in moral restraint, from the greater facility that this would give to the meeting of kindred dispositions, it might even admit of a doubt,

doubt, whether more happy marriages would not take place, and consequently more pleasure from the passion of love, than in a state such as that of America, the circumstances of which allow of a very early union of the sexes. But if we compare the intercourse of the sexes in such a society as I have been supposing, with that which now exists in Europe, taken under all its circumstances, it may safely be asserted, that, independently of the load of misery which would be removed, the sum of pleasurable sensations from the passion of love would be increased in a very great degree.

If we could suppose such a system general, the accession of happiness to society in its internal economy would scarcely be greater than in its external relations. It might fairly be expected that war, that great pest of the human race, would, under such circumstances, soon cease to extend its ravages so widely and so frequently as it does at present.

One of its first causes and most powerful impulses was undoubtedly an insufficiency of

of room and food; and greatly as the circumstances of mankind have changed since it first began, the same cause still continues to operate and to produce, though in a smaller degree, the same effects. The ambition of princes would want instruments of destruction, if the distresses of the lower classes of people did not drive them under their standards. A recruiting serjeant always prays for a bad harvest and a want of employment, or, in other words, a redundant population.

In the earlier ages of the world, when war was the great business of mankind, and the drains of population from this cause were, beyond comparison, greater than in modern times, the legislators and statesmen of each country, adverting principally to the means of offence and defence, encouraged an increase of people in every possible way, fixed a stigma on barrenness and celibacy, and honoured marriage. The popular religions followed these prevailing opinions. In many countries the prolific power of nature was the object of solemn worship. In the religion of Mahomet, which was established

established by the sword, and the promulgation of which in consequence could not be unaccompanied by an extraordinary destruction of its followers, the procreation of children to glorify the Creator was laid down as one of the principal duties of man; and he, who had the most numerous offspring, was considered as having best answered the end of his creation. The prevalence of such moral sentiments had naturally a great effect in encouraging marriage; and the rapid procreation, which followed, was partly the effect and partly the cause of incessant war. The vacancies occasioned by former desolations made room for the rearing of fresh supplies; and the overflowing rapidity, with which these supplies followed, constantly furnished fresh incitements and fresh instruments for renewed hostilities. Under the influence of such moral sentiments, it is difficult to conceive how the fury of incessant war should ever abate.

It is a pleasing confirmation of the truth and divinity of the Christian religion, and of its being adapted to a more improved

state of human society, that it places our duties respecting marriage and the procreation of children in a different light from that in which they were before beheld.

Without entering minutely into the subject, which would evidently lead too far, I think it will be admitted, that, if we apply the spirit of St. Paul's declarations respecting marriage to the present state of society and the known constitution of our nature, the natural inference seems to be, that, when marriage does not interfere with higher duties, it is right; when it does, it is wrong. According to the genuine principles of moral science, "The method of coming at "the will of God from the light of nature "is, to inquire into the tendency of the "action to promote or diminish the general "happiness[x]." There are perhaps few actions that tend so directly to diminish the general happiness, as to marry without the means of supporting children. He who commits this act, therefore, clearly offends against the will of God; and having become a burden on the society in which he

[x] Paley's Moral Philosophy, vol. i. b. ii. c. iv. p. 65.

lives,

lives, and plunged himself and family into a situation, in which virtuous habits are preserved with more difficulty than in any other, he appears to have violated his duty to his neighbours and to himself, and thus to have listened to the voice of passion in opposition to his higher obligations.

In a society, such as I have supposed, all the members of which endeavour to attain happiness by obedience to the moral code derived from the light of nature, and enforced by strong sanctions in revealed religion, it is evident that no such marriages could take place; and the prevention of a redundant population, in this way, would remove one of the principal encouragements to offensive war; and at the same time tend powerfully to eradicate those two fatal political disorders, internal tyranny and internal tumult, which mutually produce each other.

Indisposed to a war of offence, in a war of defence, such a society would be strong as a rock of adamant. Where every family possessed the necessaries of life in plenty, and a decent portion of its comforts and

conveniences, there could not exist that hope of change, or at best that melancholy and disheartening indifference to it, which sometimes prompts the lower classes of people to say, "Let what will come, we "cannot be worse off than we are now." Every heart and hand would be united to repel an invader, when each individual felt the value of the solid advantages which he enjoyed, and a prospect of change presented only a prospect of being deprived of them.

As it appears therefore, that it is in the power of each individual to avoid all the evil consequences to himself and society resulting from the principle of population, by the practice of a virtue clearly dictated to him by the light of nature, and expressly enjoined in revealed religion; and as we have reason to think, that the exercise of this virtue to a certain degree would tend rather to increase than diminish individual happiness; we can have no reason to impeach the justice of the Deity, because his general laws make this virtue necessary, and punish our offences against it by the evils attendant upon vice, and the pains

that

that accompany the various forms of premature death. A really virtuous society, such as I have supposed, would avoid these evils. It is the apparent object of the Creator to deter us from vice by the pains which accompany it, and to lead us to virtue by the happiness that it produces. This object appears to our conceptions to be worthy of a benevolent Creator. The laws of nature respecting population tend to promote this object. No imputation, therefore, on the benevolence of the Deity, can be founded on these laws, which is not equally applicable to any of the evils necessarily incidental to an imperfect state of existence.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

Of the only effectual Mode of improving the Condition of the Poor.

HE who publishes a moral code, or system of duties, however firmly he may be convinced of the strong obligation on each individual strictly to conform to it, has never the folly to imagine that it will be universally or even generally practised. But this is no valid objection against the publication of the code. If it were, the same objection would always have applied; we should be totally without general rules; and to the vices of mankind arising from temptation would be added a much longer list, than we have at present, of vices from ignorance.

Judging merely from the light of nature, if we feel convinced of the misery arising from a redundant population on the one hand, and of the evils and unhappiness, particularly to the female sex, arising from promiscuous intercourse, on the other, I do not

not see how it is possible for any person who acknowledges the principle of utility, as the great criterion of moral rules, to escape the conclusion, that moral restraint, or the abstaining from marriage till we are in a condition to support a family, with a perfectly moral conduct during that period, is the strict line of duty; and when revelation is taken into the question, this duty undoubtedly receives very powerful confirmation. At the same time I believe that few of my readers can be less sanguine than I am in their expectations of any sudden and great change in the general conduct of men on this subject: and the chief reason why in the last chapter I allowed myself to suppose the universal prevalence of this virtue was, that I might endeavour to remove any imputation on the goodness of the Deity, by shewing, that the evils arising from the principle of population were exactly of the same nature as the generality of other evils which excite fewer complaints; that they were increased by human ignorance and indolence, and diminished by human knowledge and virtue; and on the supposition

supposition that each individual strictly fulfilled his duty, would be almost totally removed; and this without any general diminution of those sources of pleasure, arising from the regulated indulgence of the passions, which have been justly considered as the principal ingredients of human happiness.

If it will answer any purpose of illustration, I see no harm in drawing the picture of a society, in which each individual is supposed strictly to fulfil his duties; nor does a writer appear to be justly liable to the imputation of being visionary, unless he make such universal or general obedience necessary to the practical utility of his system, and to that degree of moderate and partial improvement, which is all that can rationally be expected from the most complete knowledge of our duties.

But in this respect there is an essential difference between that improved state of society, which I have supposed in the last chapter, and most of the other speculations on this subject. The improvement there supposed, if we ever should make approaches

proaches towards it, is to be effected in the way in which we have been in the habit of seeing all the greatest improvements effected, by a direct application to the interest and happiness of each individual. It is not required of us to act from motives to which we are unaccustomed; to pursue a general good, which we may not distinctly comprehend, or the effect of which may be weakened by distance and diffusion. The happiness of the whole is to be the result of the happiness of individuals, and to begin first with them. No co-operation is required. Every step tells. He who performs his duty faithfully will reap the full fruits of it, whatever may be the number of others who fail. This duty is intelligible to the humblest capacity. It is merely, that he is not to bring beings into the world, for whom he cannot find the means of support. When once this subject is cleared from the obscurity thrown over it by parochial laws and private benevolence, every man must feel the strongest conviction of such an obligation. If he cannot support his children, they must starve; and if he

marry

marry in the face of a fair probability that he shall not be able to support his children, he is guilty of all the evils, which he thus brings upon himself, his wife and his offspring. It is clearly his interest, and will tend greatly to promote his happiness, to defer marrying, till by industry and economy he is in a capacity to support the children that he may reasonably expect from his marriage; and as he cannot in the mean time gratify his passions without violating an express command of God, and running a great risk of injuring himself, or some of his fellow-creatures, considerations of his own interest and happiness will dictate to him the strong obligation to a moral conduct while he remains unmarried.

However powerful may be the impulses of passion, they are generally in some degree modified by reason. And it does not seem entirely visionary to suppose that, if the true and permanent cause of poverty were clearly explained and forcibly brought home to each man's bosom, it would have some, and perhaps not an inconsiderable, influence

influence on his conduct; at least the experiment has never yet been fairly tried. Almost every thing, that has been hitherto done for the poor, has tended, as if with solicitous care, to throw a veil of obscurity over this subject, and to hide from them the true cause of their poverty. When the wages of labour are hardly sufficient to maintain two children, a man marries, and has five or six; he of course finds himself miserably distressed. He accuses the insufficiency of the price of labour to maintain a family. He accuses his parish for their tardy and sparing fulfilment of their obligation to assist him. He accuses the avarice of the rich, who suffer him to want what they can so well spare. He accuses the partial and unjust institutions of society, which have awarded him an inadequate share of the produce of the earth. He accuses perhaps the dispensations of Providence, which have assigned to him a place in society so beset with unavoidable distress and dependence. In searching for objects of accusation, he never adverts to the quarter from which his misfortunes originate.

ginate. The last person that he would think of accusing is himself, on whom in fact the principal blame lies, except so far as he has been deceived by the higher classes of society. He may perhaps wish that he had not married, because he now feels the inconveniences of it; but it never enters into his head that he can have done any thing wrong. He has always been told, that to raise up subjects for his king and country is a very meritorious act. He has done this, and yet is suffering for it; and it cannot but strike him as most extremely unjust and cruel in his king and country, to allow him thus to suffer, in return for giving them what they are continually declaring that they particularly want.

Till these erroneous ideas have been corrected, and the language of nature and reason has been generally heard on the subject of population, instead of the language of error and prejudice, it cannot be said, that any fair experiment has been made with the understandings of the common people; and we cannot justly accuse them of improvidence and want of industry, till they

they act as they do now, after it has been brought home to their comprehensions, that they are themselves the cause of their own poverty; that the means of redress are in their own hands, and in the hands of no other persons whatever; that the society in which they live, and the government which presides over it, are without any *direct* power in this respect; and that however ardently they may desire to relieve them, and whatever attempts they may make to do so, they are really and truly unable to execute what they benevolently wish, but unjustly promise; that, when the wages of labour will not maintain a family, it is an incontrovertible sign that their king and country do not want more subjects, or at least that they cannot support them; that, if they marry, in this case, so far from fulfilling a duty to society, they are throwing an useless burden on it, at the same that they are plunging themselves into distress; and that they are acting directly contrary to the will of God, and bringing down upon themselves various diseases, which might all, or the greater part, have been avoided, if they had

had attended to the repeated admonitions, which he gives by the general laws of nature to every being capable of reason.

Paley, in his Moral Philosophy, observes, that "in countries in which subsistence is "become scarce, it behoves the state to "watch over the public morals with in-"creased solicitude; for nothing but the "instinct of nature, under the restraint of "chastity, will induce men to undertake "the labour, or consent to the sacrifice of "personal liberty and indulgence, which "the support of a family in such circum-"stances requires[a]." That it is always the duty of a state to use every exertion likely to be effectual in discouraging vice and promoting virtue, and that no temporary circumstances ought to cause any relaxation in these exertions, is certainly true. The means therefore proposed are always good; but the particular end in view in this case appears to be absolutely criminal. We wish to force people into marriage, when from the acknowledged scarcity of subsistence they will have little

[a] Vol. ii. c. xi. p. 352.

chance

chance of being able to support their children. We might as well force people into the water who are unable to swim. In both cases we rashly tempt Providence. Nor have we more reason to believe that a miracle will be worked to save us from the misery and mortality resulting from our conduct in the one case than in the other.

The object of those, who really wish to better the condition of the lower classes of society, must be to raise the relative proportion between the price of labour and the price of provisions, so as to enable the labourer to command a larger share of the necessaries and comforts of life. We have hitherto principally attempted to attain this end by encouraging the married poor, and consequently increasing the number of labourers, and overstocking the market with a commodity which we still say that we wish to be dear. It would seem to have required no great spirit of divination, to foretel the certain failure of such a plan of proceeding. There is nothing however like experience. It has been tried in many different countries,

and

and for many hundred years, and the success has always been answerable to the nature of the scheme. It is really time now to try something else.

When it was found that oxygen, or pure vital air, would not cure consumptions, as was expected, but rather aggravated their symptoms, trial was made of an air of the most opposite kind. I wish we had acted with the same philosophical spirit in our attempts to cure the disease of poverty; and having found that the pouring in of fresh supplies of labour only tended to aggravate the symptoms, had tried what would be the effect of withholding a little these supplies.

In all old and fully-peopled states it is from this method, and this alone, that we can rationally expect any essential and permanent melioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

In an endeavour to raise the proportion of the quantity of provisions to the number of consumers in any country, our attention would naturally be first directed to the increasing of the absolute quantity of provisions;

visions; but finding that, as fast as we did this, the number of consumers more than kept pace with it, and that with all our exertions we were still as far as ever behind, we should be convinced, that our efforts directed only in this way would never succeed. It would appear to be setting the tortoise to catch the hare. Finding, therefore, that from the laws of nature we could not proportion the food to the population, our next attempt should naturally be, to proportion the population to the food. If we can persuade the hare to go to sleep, the tortoise may have some chance of overtaking her.

We are not however to relax our efforts in increasing the quantity of provisions, but to combine another effort with it; that of keeping the population, when once it has been overtaken, at such a distance behind, as to effect the relative proportion which we desire; and thus unite the two grand *desiderata*, a great actual population, and a state of society, in which abject poverty and dependence are comparatively but little

known; two objects which are far from being incompatible.

If we be really serious in what appears to be the object of such general research, the mode of essentially and permanently bettering the condition of the poor, we must explain to them the true nature of their situation, and shew them, that the withholding of the supplies of labour is the only possible way of really raising its price; and that they themselves, being the possessors of this commodity, have alone the power to do this.

I cannot but consider this mode of diminishing poverty as so perfectly clear in theory, and so invariably confirmed by the analogy of every other commodity which is brought to market, that nothing but its being shewn to be calculated to produce greater evils than it proposes to remedy, can justify us in not making the attempt to put it into execution.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

Objections to this Mode considered.

ONE objection which perhaps will be made to this plan is, that from which alone it derives its value—a market rather understocked with labour. This must undoubtedly take place in a certain degree; but by no means in such a degree as to affect the wealth and prosperity of the country. But putting this subject of a market understocked with labour in the most unfavourable point of view, if the rich will not submit to a slight inconvenience necessarily attendant on the attainment of what they profess to desire, they cannot really be in earnest in their professions. Their benevolence to the poor must be either childish play or hypocrisy; it must be either to amuse themselves or to pacify the minds of the common people with a mere show of attention to their wants. To wish to better

the condition of the poor by enabling them to command a greater quantity of the necessaries and comforts of life, and then to complain of high wages, is the act of a silly boy who gives away his cake and then cries for it. A market overstocked with labour, and an ample remuneration to each labourer, are objects perfectly incompatible with each other. In the annals of the world they never existed together; and to couple them even in imagination betrays a gross ignorance of the simplest principles of political economy.

A second objection that may be made to this plan is, the diminution of population that it would cause. It is to be considered, however, that this diminution is merely relative; and when once this relative diminution has been effected, by keeping the population stationary, while the supply of food has increased, it might then start afresh, and continue increasing for ages, with the increase of food, maintaining always nearly the same relative proportion to it. I can easily conceive that this country, with a proper direction of the national industry,

dustry, might, in the course of some centuries, contain two or three times its present population, and yet every man in the kingdom be much better fed and clothed than he is at present. While the springs of industry continue in vigour, and a sufficient part of that industry is directed to agriculture, we need be under no apprehensions of a deficient population; and nothing perhaps would tend so strongly to excite a spirit of industry and economy among the poor, as a thorough knowledge that their happiness must always depend principally upon themselves; and that, if they obey their passions in opposition to their reason, or be not industrious and frugal while they are single, to save a sum for the common contingencies of the married state, they must expect to suffer the natural evils which Providence has prepared for those who disobey its repeated admonitions.

A third objection which may be started to this plan, and the only one which appears to me to have any kind of plausibility, is that, by endeavouring to urge the duty of

of moral restraint on the poor, we may increase the quantity of vice relating to the sex.

I should be extremely sorry to say any thing, which could either directly or remotely be construed unfavourably to the cause of virtue; but I certainly cannot think that the vices which relate to the sex are the only vices which are to be considered in a moral question; or that they are even the greatest and most degrading to the human character. They can rarely or never be committed without producing unhappiness somewhere or other, and therefore ought always to be strongly reprobated: but there are other vices, the effects of which are still more pernicious; and there are other situations, which lead more certainly to moral offences than the refraining from marriage. Powerful as may be the temptations to a breach of chastity, I am inclined to think that they are impotent, in comparison of the temptations arising from continued distress. A large class of women, and many men, I have no doubt, pass a considerable part of their lives consistently with

with the laws of chastity; but I believe there will be found very few, who pass through the ordeal of squalid and hopeless poverty, or even of long continued embarrassed circumstances, without a great moral degradation of character.

In the higher and middle classes of society, it is a melancholy and distressing sight to observe, not unfrequently, a man of a noble and ingenuous disposition, once feelingly alive to a sense of honour and integrity, gradually sinking under the pressure of circumstances, making his excuses at first with a blush of conscious shame, afraid of seeing the faces of his friends from whom he may have borrowed money, reduced to the meanest tricks and subterfuges to delay or avoid the payment of his just debts; till ultimately grown familiar with falsehood and at enmity with the world, he loses all the grace and dignity of man.

To the general prevalence of indigence, and the extraordinary encouragements which we afford in this country to a total want of foresight and prudence among the common

common people [a], is to be attributed a considerable part of those continual depredations on property, and other more atrocious crimes, which drive us to the painful resource of such a number of executions [b]. According to Mr. Colquhoun, above twenty thousand miserable individuals of various classes rise up every morning without knowing how or by what means they are to be

[a] Mr. Colquhoun, speaking of the poor-laws, observes, that "In spite of all the ingenious arguments which have "been used in favour of a system, admitted to be wisely "conceived in its origin, the effects it has produced incon-"testably prove that, with respect to the mass of the "poor, there is something radically wrong in the execu-"tion. If it were not so, it is impossible that there "could exist in the metropolis such an inconceivable "portion of human misery, amidst examples of munifi-"cence and benevolence unparalleled in any age or coun-"try." Police of Metropolis, c. xiii. p. 359.

In the effects of the poor-laws, I fully agree with Mr. Colquhoun; but I cannot agree with him in admitting, that the system was well conceived in its origin. I attribute still more evil to the original ill conception, than to the subsequent ill execution.

[b] Mr. Colquhoun observes, that "Indigence in the "present state of society may be considered as a principal "cause of the increase of crimes." Police of Metropolis, c. xiii. p. 352.

supported

supported during the passing day, or where, in many instances, they are to lodge on the succeeding night [a]. It is by these unhappy persons that the principal depredations on the public are committed: and supposing but few of them to be married, and driven to these acts from the necessity of supporting their children; yet still it is probably true, that the too great frequency of marriage amongst the poorest classes of society, is one of the principal causes of the temptations to these crimes. A considerable part of these unhappy wretches will probably be found to be the offspring of such marriages, educated in workhouses where every vice is propagated, or bred up at home in filth and rags, with an utter ignorance of every moral obligation [b]. A still greater part perhaps consists of persons, who, being unable for some time to get employment owing to the full supply of labour, have been urged to these extremities by their temporary wants; and, having thus lost their characters, are rejected, even when their labour may be wanted,

[a] Police of Metropolis, c. xi. p. 313.
[b] Id. c. xi. xii. p. 355, 370.

by

by the well-founded caution of civil society [a].

When

[a] Police of the Metropolis, c. xiii. p. 353, et seq. In so large a town as London, which must necessarily encourage a prodigious influx of strangers from the country, there must be always a great many persons out of work; and it is probable, that some public institution for the relief of the casual poor upon a plan similar to that proposed by Mr. Colquhoun (c. xiii. p. 371) would, under very judicious management, produce more good than evil. But for this purpose it would be absolutely necessary that, if work were provided by the institution, the sum that a man could earn by it should be less than the worst paid common labour; otherwise the claimants would rapidly increase, and the funds would soon be inadequate to their object. In the institution at Hamburgh, which appears to have been the most successful of any yet established, the nature of the work was such, that, though paid above the usual price, a person could not easily earn by it more than eighteen pence a week. It was the determined principle of the managers of the institution, to reduce the support which they gave lower than what any industrious man or woman in such circumstances could earn. (Account of the Management of the Poor in Hamburgh, by C. Voght, p. 18.) And it is to this principle that they attribute their success. It should be observed however, that neither the institution at Hamburgh, nor that planned by Count Rumford in Bavaria, has subsisted long enough for us to be able to pronounce on their permanent good effects. It will not admit of a doubt, that

institutions

When indigence does not produce overt acts of vice, it palsies every virtue. Under the continued temptations to a breach of chastity, occasional failures may take place, and the moral sensibility in other respects not be very strikingly impaired; but the continued temptations which beset hopeless poverty, and the strong sense of injustice that generally accompanies it from an ignorance of its true cause, tend so powerfully to sour the disposition, to harden the heart and deaden the moral sense, that, generally speaking, virtue takes her flight clear away from the tainted spot, and does not often return.

Even with respect to the vices which re-

institutions for the relief of the poor, on their first establishment, remove a great quantity of distress. The only question is, whether, as succeeding generations arise, the increasing funds necessary for their support, and the increasing numbers that become dependent, are not greater evils than that which was to be remedied; and whether the country will not ultimately be left with as much mendicity as before, besides all the poverty and dependence accumulated in the public institutions. This seems to be nearly the case in England at present. It may be doubted whether we should have more beggars if we had no poor-laws.

late

late to the sex, marriage has been found to be by no means a complete remedy. Among the higher classes, our Doctors' Commons, and the lives that many married men are known to lead, sufficiently prove this; and the same kind of vice, though not so much heard of among the lower classes of people, is probably in all our great towns not much less frequent.

Add to this, that abject poverty, particularly when joined with idleness, is a state the most unfavourable to chastity that can well be conceived. The passion is as strong, or nearly so, as in other situations; and every restraint on it from personal respect, or a sense of morality, is generally removed. There is a degree of squalid poverty, in which, if a girl was brought up, I should say, that her being really modest at twenty was an absolute miracle. Those persons must have extraordinary minds indeed, and such as are not usually formed under similar circumstances, who can continue to respect themselves, when no other person whatever respects them. If the children thus brought up were even to marry

marry at twenty, it is probable, that they would have passed some years in vicious habits before that period.

If after all, however, these arguments should appear insufficient; if we reprobate the idea of endeavouring to encourage the virtue of moral restraint among the poor, from a fear of producing vice; and if we think, that to facilitate marriage by all possible means is a point of the first consequence to the morality and happiness of the people; let us act consistently, and before we proceed, endeavour to make ourselves acquainted with the mode by which alone we can effect our object.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

Of the Consequences of pursuing the opposite Mode.

IT is an evident truth that, whatever may be the rate of increase in the means of subsistence, the increase of population must be limited by it, at least after the food has once been divided into the smallest shares that will support life. All the children born, beyond what would be required to keep up the population to this level, must necessarily perish, unless room be made for them by the deaths of grown persons. It has appeared indeed clearly in the course of this work, that in all old states the marriages and births depend principally upon the deaths, and that there is no encouragement to early unions so powerful as a great mortality. To act consistently therefore, we should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavouring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality;

tality; and if we dread the too frequent visitation of the horrid form of famine, we should sedulously encourage the other forms of destruction, which we compel nature to use. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations[a]. But above all, we should reprobate specific remedies

[a] Necker, speaking of the proportion of the births in France, makes use of a new and instructive expression on this subject, though he hardly seems to be sufficiently aware of it himself. He says, "Le nombre des naissances "est à celui des habitans de un à vingt-trois et vingt-"quatre dans les lieux *contrariés par la nature, ou par* "*des circonstances morales: ce même* rapport dans la plus "grande partie de la France, est de un à 25,25½. & 26." Administ. des Finances, tom. i. c. ix. p. 254. 12mo. It would appear therefore, that we had nothing more to do, than to settle people in marshy situations, and oppress them by a bad government, in order to attain what politicians have hitherto considered as so desirable—a great proportion of marriages and a great proportion of births.

for

for ravaging diseases; and those benevolent, but much mistaken men, who have thought they were doing a service to mankind by projecting schemes for the total extirpation of particular disorders. If by these and similar means the annual mortality were increased from 1 in 36 or 40, to 1 in 18 or 20, we might probably every one of us marry at the age of puberty, and yet few be absolutely starved.

If however, we all marry at this age, and yet still continue our exertions to impede the operations of nature, we may rest assured that all our efforts will be vain. Nature will not, nor cannot, be defeated in her purposes. The necessary mortality must come, in some form or other; and the extirpation of one disease will only be the signal for the birth of another perhaps more fatal. We cannot lower the waters of misery by pressing them down in different places, which must necessarily make them rise somewhere else: the only way in which we can hope to effect our purpose, is by drawing them off. To this course nature is constantly directing our attention by

by the chastisements which await a contrary conduct. These chastisements are more or less severe, in proportion to the degree in which her admonitions produce their intended effect. In this country at present these admonitions are by no means entirely neglected. The preventive check to population prevails to a considerable degree, and her chastisements are in consequence moderate: but if we were all to marry at the age of puberty, they would be severe indeed. Political evils would probably be added to physical. A people goaded by constant distress, and visited by frequent returns of famine, could not be kept down but by a cruel despotism. We should approach to the state of the people in Egypt or Abyssinia; and I would ask, whether in that case it is probable, that we should be more virtuous?

Physicians have long remarked the great changes which take place in diseases; and that, while some appear to yield to the efforts of human care and skill, others seem to become in proportion more malignant

and fatal. Dr. William Heberden published, not long since, some valuable observations on this subject deduced from the London bills of mortality. In his preface, speaking of these bills, he says, "the gradual changes they exhibit in particular "diseases correspond to the alterations, "which in time are known to take place "in the channels through which the great "stream of mortality is constantly flowing[a]." In the body of his work, afterwards, speaking of some particular diseases, he observes with that candour which always distinguishes true science: "It is not easy to give a satisfactory reason for all the changes which "may be observed to take place in the "history of diseases. Nor is it any disgrace to physicians, if their causes are "often so gradual in their operation, or so "subtile, as to elude investigation[b]."

I hope I shall not be accused of presumption, in venturing to suggest that,

[a] Observations on the Increase and Decrease of different Diseases. Preface, p. 5. 4to. 1801.

[b] Id. p. 43, 4to. 1801.

under

under certain circumstances, such changes must take place; and perhaps without any alteration in those proximate causes, which are usually looked to on these occasions. If this should appear to be true, it will not seem extraordinary that the most skilful and scientific physicians, whose business it is principally to investigate proximate causes, should sometimes search for these causes in vain.

In a country which keeps its population at a certain standard, if the average number of marriages and births be given, it is evident that the average number of deaths will also be given; and, to use Dr. Heberden's metaphor, the channels, through which the great stream of mortality is constantly flowing, will always convey off a given quantity. Now if we stop up any of these channels, it is perfectly clear, that the stream of mortality must run with greater force through some of the other channels; that is, if we eradicate some diseases, others will become proportionally more fatal. In this case the only distinguishable cause is the damming up a necessary outlet of mor-

tality *. Nature, in the attainment of her great purposes, seems always to seize upon the weakest part. If this part be made strong by human skill, she seizes upon the next weakest part, and so on in succession; not like a capricious deity, with an intention to sport with our sufferings, and constantly to defeat our labours; but like a kind, though sometimes severe instructor, with the intention of teaching us to make all parts strong, and to chase vice and misery from the earth. In avoiding one fault we are too apt to run into some other; but we always find Nature faithful to her great object, at every false step we commit, ready to admonish us of our errors, by the infliction of some physical or moral evil. If the prevalence of the preventive check to population in a sufficient degree were to remove many of those diseases, which now afflict us, yet be accompanied by a considerable increase of the vice of promiscuous intercourse, it is probable that the disorders

* The way in which it operates is probably by increasing poverty, in consequence of a supply of labour too rapid for the demand.

and

and unhappiness, the physical and moral evils arising from this vice, would increase in strength and degree; and, admonishing us severely of our error, would point to the only line of conduct approved by nature, reason and religion, abstinence from marriage till we can support our children, and chastity till that period arrives.

In the case just stated, in which the population and the number of marriages are supposed to be fixed, the necessity of a change in the mortality of some diseases, from the diminution or extinction of others, is capable of mathematical demonstration. The only obscurity which can possibly involve this subject, arises from taking into consideration the effect that might be produced by a diminution of mortality in increasing the population, or in decreasing the number of marriages. That the removal of any of the particular causes of mortality can have no further effect upon population than the means of subsistence will allow, and that it has no certain and necessary influence on these means of subsistence, are facts of which the reader must be

be already convinced. Of its operation in tending to prevent marriage, by diminishing the demand for fresh supplies of children, I have no doubt; and there is reason to think, that it had this effect in no inconsiderable degree on the extinction of the plague, which had so long and so dreadfully ravaged this country. Dr. Heberden draws a striking picture of the favourable change observed in the health of the people of England since this period; and justly attributes it to the improvements which have gradually taken place, not only in London but in all great towns; and in the manner of living throughout the kingdom, particularly with respect to cleanliness and ventilation[a]. But these causes would not have produced the effect observed, if they had not been accompanied by an increase of the preventive check; and probably the spirit of cleanliness, and better mode of living, which then began to prevail, by spreading more generally a decent and useful pride, principally contributed to this

[a] Observations on Increase and Decrease of Diseases, p. 35.

increase.

increase. The diminution in the number of marriages, however, was not sufficient to make up for the great decrease of mortality, from the extinction of the plague, and the striking reduction of the deaths in the dysentery [a]. While these and some other disorders became almost evanescent, consumption, palsy, apoplexy, gout, lunacy, and the small-pox, became more mortal [b]. The widening of these drains was necessary to carry off the population which still remained redundant, notwithstanding the increased operation of the preventive check, and the part which was annually disposed of and enabled to subsist by the increase of agriculture.

Dr. Haygarth, in the Sketch of his benevolent plan for the extermination of the casual small-pox, draws a frightful picture of the mortality which has been occasioned by this distemper, attributes to it the slow progress of population, and makes some curious calculations on the favourable effects which would be produced in this

[a] Observ. on Inc. and Dec. of Diseases, p. 34.

[b] Id. p. 36, et seq.

respect

respect by its extermination [a]. His conclusions, however, I fear, would not follow from his premises. I am far from doubting that millions and millions of human beings have been destroyed by the small-pox. But were its devastations, as Dr. Haygarth supposes, many thousand degrees greater than the plague [b], I should still doubt whether the average population of the earth had been diminished by them. The small-pox is certainly one of the channels, and a very broad one, which nature has opened for the last thousand years, to keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence; but had this been closed, others would have become wider, or new ones would have been formed. In ancient times the mortality from war and the plague was incomparably greater than in modern. On the gradual diminution of this stream of mortality, the generation and almost universal prevalence of the small-pox is a great and striking instance of one of those changes in the channels of mortality, which ought

[a] Vol. i. part ii. sect. v. and vi.

[b] Id. s. viii. p. 164.

to

to awaken our attention and animate us to patient and persevering investigation. For my own part I feel not the slightest doubt, that, if the introduction of the cow-pox should extirpate the small-pox, and yet the number of marriages continue the same, we shall find a very percepticle difference in the increased mortality of some other diseases. Nothing could prevent this effect but a sudden start in our agriculture; and if this should take place, it will not be so much owing to the number of children saved from death by the cow-pox inoculation, as to the alarms occasioned among the people of property by the late scarcities[a], and to the increased gains of farmers, which have been so absurdly reprobated. I am strongly however inclined to believe that the number of marriages will not, in this case, remain the same; but that the gradual light, which may be expected to be thrown on this interesting topic of human

[a] The scarce harvests of 1799 and 1800. The start here alluded to, certainly took place from 1801 to 1814, and provision was really made for the diminished mortality.

inquiry,

inquiry, will teach us how to make the extinction of a mortal disorder a real blessing to us, a real improvement in the general health and happiness of the society.

If, on contemplating the increase of vice which might contingently follow an attempt to inculcate the duty of moral restraint, and the increase of misery that must necessarily follow the attempts to encourage marriage and population, we come to the conclusion, not to interfere in any respect, but to leave every man to his own free choice, and responsible only to God for the evil which he does in either way; this is all I contend for; I would on no account do more; but I contend, that at present we are very far from doing this.

Among the lower classes of society, where the point is of the greatest importance, the poor-laws afford a direct, constant and systematical encouragement to marriage, by removing from each individual that heavy responsibility, which he would incur by the laws of nature, for bringing beings into the world which he could not support. Our private benevolence has the same direction as the

the poor-laws, and almost invariably tends to encourage marriage, and to equalize as much as possible the circumstances of married and single men.

Among the higher classes of people, the superior distinctions which married women receive, and the marked inattentions to which single women of advanced age are exposed, enable many men, who are agreeable neither in mind nor person, and are besides in the wane of life, to choose a partner among the young and fair, instead of being confined, as nature seems to dictate, to persons of nearly their own age and accomplishments. It is scarcely to be doubted, that the fear of being an old maid, and of that silly and unjust ridicule, which folly sometimes attaches to this name, drives many women into the marriage union with men whom they dislike, or at best to whom they are perfectly indifferent. Such marriages must to every delicate mind appear little better than legal prostitutions; and they often burden the earth with unnecessary children, without compensating for it by

by an accession of happiness and virtue to the parties themselves.

Throughout all the ranks of society, the prevailing opinions respecting the duty and obligation of marriage cannot but have a very powerful influence. The man who thinks that, in going out of the world without leaving representatives behind him, he shall have failed in an important duty to society, will be disposed to force rather than to repress his inclinations on this subject; and when his reason represents to him the difficulties attending a family, he will endeavour not to attend to these suggestions, will still determine to venture, and will hope that, in the discharge of what he conceives to be his duty, he shall not be deserted by Providence.

In a civilized country, such as England, where a taste for the decencies and comforts of life prevails among a very large class of people, it is not possible that the encouragements to marriage from positive institutions and prevailing opinions should entirely obscure the light of nature and reason

son on this subject; but still they contribute to make it comparatively weak and indistinct. And till this obscurity is removed, and the poor are undeceived with respect to the principal cause of their poverty, and taught to know, that their future happiness or misery must depend chiefly upon themselves, it cannot be said that, with regard to the great question of marriage, we leave every man to his own free and fair choice.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

Effects of the Knowledge of the principal Cause of Poverty on Civil Liberty.

IT may appear, perhaps, that a doctrine, which attributes the greatest part of the sufferings of the lower classes of society exclusively to themselves, is unfavourable to the cause of liberty, as affording a tempting opportunity to governments of oppressing their subjects at pleasure, and laying the whole blame on the laws of nature and the imprudence of the poor. We are not however to trust to first appearances; and I am strongly disposed to believe that those who will be at the pains to consider this subject deeply will be convinced, that nothing would so powerfully contribute to the advancement of rational freedom, as a thorough knowledge generally circulated of the principal cause of poverty; and that the ignorance of this cause,

cause, and the natural consequences of this ignorance, form at present one of the chief obstacles to its progress.

The pressure of distress on the lower classes of people, together with the habit of attributing this distress to their rulers, appears to me to be the rock of defence, the castle, the guardian spirit of despotism. It affords to the tyrant the fatal and unanswerable plea of necessity. It is the reason why every free government tends constantly to destruction; and that its appointed guardians become daily less jealous of the encroachments of power. It is the reason why so many noble efforts in the cause of freedom have failed; and why almost every revolution, after long and painful sacrifices, has terminated in a military despotism. While any dissatisfied man of talents has power to persuade the lower classes of people that all their poverty and distress arise solely from the iniquity of the government, though perhaps the greatest part of what they suffer is unconnected with this cause, it is evident that the seeds of fresh discontents and fresh revolutions are

are continually sowing. When an established government has been destroyed, finding that their poverty is not removed, their resentment naturally falls upon the successors to power; and when these have been immolated without producing the desired effect, other sacrifices are called for, and so on without end. Are we to be surprised that, under such circumstances, the majority of well-disposed people, finding that a government with proper restrictions is unable to support itself against the revolutionary spirit, and weary and exhausted with perpetual change to which they can see no end, should give up the struggle in despair, and throw themselves into the arms of the first power which can afford them protection against the horrors of anarchy?

A mob, which is generally the growth of a redundant population goaded by resentment for real sufferings, but totally ignorant of the quarter from which they originate, is of all monsters the most fatal to freedom. It fosters a prevailing tyranny, and engenders one where it was not; and though, in

in its dreadful fits of resentment, it appears occasionally to devour its unsightly offspring; yet no sooner is the horrid deed committed, than, however unwilling it may be to propagate such a breed, it immediately groans with a new birth.

Of the tendency of mobs to produce tyranny we may not perhaps be long without an example in this country. As a friend to freedom, and naturally an enemy to large standing armies, it is with extreme reluctance that I am compelled to acknowledge that, had it not been for the great organized force in the country, the distresses of the people during the late scarcities [a], encouraged by the extreme ignorance and folly of many among the higher classes, might have driven them to commit the most dreadful outrages, and ultimately to involve the country in all the horrors of famine. Should such periods often recur, (a recurrence which we have too much reason to apprehend from the present state of the country,) the prospect which opens to our view is melancholy in the extreme. The

[a] 1800 and 1801.

English constitution will be seen hastening with rapid strides to the *Euthanasia* foretold by Hume, unless its progress be interrupted by some popular commotion; and this alternative presents a picture still more appalling to the imagination. If political discontents were blended with the cries of hunger, and a revolution were to take place by the instrumentality of a mob clamouring for want of food, the consequences would be unceasing change and unceasing carnage, the bloody career of which nothing but the establishment of some complete despotism could arrest.

We can scarcely believe that the appointed guardians of British liberty should quietly have acquiesced in those gradual encroachments of power which have taken place of late years, but from the apprehension of these still more dreadful evils. Great as has been the influence of corruption, I cannot yet think so meanly of the country gentlemen of England, as to believe that they would thus have given up a part of their birthright of liberty, if they had not been actuated by a real and genuine fear that

that it was then in greater danger from the people than from the crown. They appeared to surrender themselves to government, on condition of being protected from the mob; but they never would have made this melancholy and disheartening surrender, if such a mob had not existed either in reality or in imagination. That the fears on this subject were artfully exaggerated and increased beyond the limits of just apprehension, is undeniable; but I think it is also undeniable that the frequent declamations which were heard against the unjust institutions of society, and the delusive arguments on equality which were circulated among the lower classes, gave us just reason to suppose that, if the *vox populi* had been allowed to speak, it would have appeared to be the voice of error and absurdity, instead of the *vox Dei*.

To say that our conduct is not to be regulated by circumstances, is to betray an ignorance of the most solid and incontrovertible principles of morality. Though the admission of this principle may sometimes afford a cloak to changes of opinion

that do not result from the purest motives; yet the admission of a contrary principle would be productive of infinitely worse consequences. The phrase of "existing circumstances" has, I believe, not unfrequently created a smile in the English House of Commons; but the smile should have been reserved for the application of the phrase, and not have been excited by the phrase itself. A very frequent repetition of it has indeed, of itself, rather a suspicious air; and its application should always be watched with the most jealous and anxious attention; but no man ought to be judged *in limine* for saying, that existing circumstances had obliged him to alter his opinions and conduct. The country gentlemen were perhaps too easily convinced that existing circumstances called upon them to give up some of the most valuable privileges of Englishmen; but as far as they were really convinced of this obligation, they acted consistently with the clearest rule of morality.

The degree of power to be given to the civil government, and the measure of our submission

submission to it, must be determined by general expediency; and in judging of this expediency every circumstance is to be taken into consideration; particularly the state of public opinion, and the degree of ignorance and delusion prevailing among the common people. The patriot who might be called upon by the love of his country to join with heart and hand in a rising of the people for some specific attainable object of reform, if he knew that they were enlightened respecting their own situation, and would stop short when they had attained their demand, would be called upon by the same motive to submit to very great oppression rather than give the slightest countenance to a popular tumult, the members of which, at least the greater number of them, were persuaded that the destruction of the Parliament, the Lord Mayor and the monopolizers, would make bread cheap, and that a revolution would enable them all to support their families. In this case it is more the ignorance and delusion of the lower classes of people that occasions the oppression,

oppression, than the actual disposition of the government to tyranny.

That there is however in all power a constant tendency to encroach is an incontrovertible truth, and cannot be too strongly inculcated. The checks, which are necessary to secure the liberty of the subject, will always in some degree embarrass and delay the operations of the executive government. The members of this government feeling these inconveniences, while they are exerting themselves, as they conceive, in the service of their country, and conscious perhaps of no ill intention towards the people, will naturally be disposed, on every occasion, to demand the suspension or abolition of these checks; but if once the convenience of ministers be put in competition with the liberties of the people, and we get into a habit of relying on fair assurances and personal character, instead of examining, with the most scrupulous and jealous care, the merits of each particular case, there is an end of British freedom. If we once admit the principle, that

that the government must know better with regard to the quantity of power which it wants, than we can possibly do with our limited means of information, and that therefore it is our duty to surrender up our private judgments, we may just as well at the same time surrender up the whole of our constitution. Government is a quarter in which liberty is not nor cannot be very faithfully preserved. If we are wanting to ourselves, and inattentive to our great interests in this respect, it is the height of folly and unreasonableness to expect, that government will attend to them for us. Should the British constitution ultimately lapse into a despotism, as has been prophesied, I shall think that the country gentlemen of England will have much more to answer for than the ministers.

To do the country gentlemen justice, however, I should readily acknowledge that in the partial desertion of their posts as guardians of British freedom, which has already taken place, they have been actuated more by fear than corruption. And the principal reason of this fear was, I conceive, the

the ignorance and delusions of the common people, and the prospective horrors which were contemplated, if in such a state of mind they should by any revolutionary movement obtain an ascendant.

The circulation of Paine's Rights of Man, it is supposed, has done great mischief among the lower and middling classes of people in this country. This is probably true; but not because man is without rights, or that these rights ought not to be known; but because Mr. Paine has fallen into some fundamental errors respecting the principles of government, and in many important points has shewn himself totally unacquainted with the structure of society, and the different moral effects to be expected from the physical difference between this country and America. Mobs of the same description as those collections of people known by this name in Europe could not exist in America. The number of people without property is there, from the physical state of the country, comparatively small; and therefore the civil power, which is to protect property, cannot require the same

same degree of strength. Mr. Paine very justly observes, that whatever the apparent cause of any riots may be, the real one is always want of happiness; but when he goes on to say, it shews that something is wrong in the system of government, that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved, he falls into the common error of attributing all want of happiness to government. It is evident that this want of happiness might have existed, and from ignorance might have been the principal cause of the riots, and yet be almost wholly unconnected with any of the proceedings of government. The redundant population of an old state furnishes materials of unhappiness, unknown to such a state as that of America; and if an attempt were to be made to remedy this unhappiness by distributing the produce of the taxes to the poorer classes of society, according to the plan proposed by Mr. Paine, the evil would be aggravated a hundred fold, and in a very short time no sum that the society could possibly raise would be adequate to the proposed object.

Nothing would so effectually counteract the

the mischiefs occasioned by Mr. Paine's Rights of Man, as a general knowledge of the real rights of man. What these rights are it is not my business at present to explain; but there is one right which man has generally been thought to possess, which I am confident he neither does nor can possess—a right to subsistence when his labour will not fairly purchase it. Our laws indeed say that he has this right, and bind the society to furnish employment and food to those who cannot get them in the regular market; but in so doing they attempt to reverse the laws of nature; and it is in consequence to be expected, not only that they should fail in their object, but that the poor, who were intended to be benefitted, should suffer most cruelly from the inhuman deceit thus practised upon them.

The Abbé Raynal has said, that "Avant "toutes les loix sociales l'homme avoit le "droit de subsister[a]." He might with just as much propriety have said that, before the institution of social laws, every man had a right to live a hundred years. Undoubt-

[a] Raynal, Hist. des Indes, vol. x. s. x. p. 322, 8vo.

edly

edly he had then, and has still, a good right to live a hundred years, nay a thousand, *if he can*, without interfering with the right of others to live; but the affair in both cases is principally an affair of power, not of right. Social laws very greatly increase this power, by enabling a much greater number to subsist than could subsist without them, and so far very greatly enlarge *le droit de subsister;* but, neither before nor after the institution of social laws, could an unlimited number subsist; and before, as well as since, he who ceased to have the power ceased to have the right.

If the great truths on these subjects were more generally circulated, and the lower classes of people could be convinced that by the laws of nature, independently of any particular institutions, except the great one of property, which is absolutely necessary in order to attain any considerable produce, no person has any claim of *right* on society for subsistence, if his labour will not purchase it, the greatest part of the mischievous declamation on the unjust institutions of society would fall powerless to the ground. The poor are by no means inclined to be visionary

visionary. Their distresses are always real, though they are not attributed to the real causes. If these causes were properly explained to them, and they were taught to know what part of their present distress was attributable to government, and what part to causes totally unconnected with it, discontent and irritation among the lower classes of people would shew themselves much less frequently than at present; and when they did shew themselves, would be much less to be dreaded. The efforts of turbulent and discontented men in the middle classes of society might safely be disregarded, if the poor were so far enlightened respecting the real nature of their situation, as to be aware that by aiding them in their schemes of renovation, they would probably be promoting the ambitious views of others, without in any respect benefitting themselves. And the country gentlemen and men of property in England might securely return to a wholesome jealousy of the encroachments of power; and instead of daily sacrificing the liberties of the subject on the altar of public safety, might, without any just apprehension from the people, not

not only tread back all their late steps, but firmly insist upon those gradual reforms, which the lapse of time and the storms of the political world have rendered necessary, to prevent the gradual destruction of the British constitution.

All improvements in governments must necessarily originate with persons of some education; and these will of course be found among the people of property. Whatever may be said of a few, it is impossible to suppose that the great mass of the people of property should be really interested in the abuses of government. They merely submit to them from the fear that an endeavour to remove them might be productive of greater evils. Could we but take away this fear, reform and improvement would proceed with as much facility as the removal of nuisances, or the paving and lighting of the streets. In human life we are continually called upon to submit to a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater; and it is the part of a wise man to do this readily and cheerfully; but no wise man will submit to any evil, if he can get rid of it without

without danger. Remove all apprehension from the tyranny or folly of the people, and the tyranny of government could not stand a moment. It would then appear in its proper deformity, without palliation, without pretext, without protector. Naturally feeble in itself, when it was once stripped naked, and deprived of the support of public opinion and of the great plea of necessity, it would fall without a struggle. Its few interested defenders would hide their heads abashed, and would be ashamed any longer to support a cause, for which no human ingenuity could invent a plausible argument.

The most successful supporters of tyranny are without doubt those general declaimers, who attribute the distresses of the poor, and almost all the evils to which society is subject, to human institutions and the iniquity of governments. The falsity of these accusations, and the dreadful consequences that would result from their being generally admitted and acted upon, make it absolutely necessary that they should at all events be resisted; not only on account of the immediate

immediate revolutionary horrors to be expected from a movement of the people acting under such impressions (a consideration which must at all times have very great weight); but also on account of the extreme probability that such a revolution would terminate in a much worse despotism than that which it had destroyed. On these grounds a genuine friend of freedom, a zealous advocate for the real rights of man, might be found among the defenders of a considerable degree of tyranny. A cause bad in itself might be supported by the good and the virtuous, merely because that which was opposed to it was much worse; and because it was absolutely necessary at the moment to make a choice between the two. Whatever therefore may be the intention of those indiscriminate accusations against governments, their real effect undoubtedly is, to add a weight of talents and principles to the prevailing power, which it never would have received otherwise.

It is a truth, which I trust has been sufficiently proved in the course of this work, that under a government constructed upon the

the best and purest principles, and executed by men of the highest talents and integrity, the most squalid poverty and wretchedness might universally prevail from an inattention to the prudential check to population. And as this cause of unhappiness has hitherto been so little understood, that the efforts of society have always tended rather to aggravate than to lessen it, we have the strongest reasons for supposing that, in all the governments with which we are acquainted, a great part of the misery to be observed among the lower classes of the people arises from this cause.

The inference therefore which Mr. Paine and others have drawn against governments from the unhappiness of the people, is palpably unfair; and before we give a sanction to such accusations, it is a debt we owe to truth and justice, to ascertain how much of this unhappiness arises from the principle of population, and how much is fairly to be attributed to government. When this distinction has been properly made, and all the vague, indefinite and false accusations removed, government would remain,

as

as it ought to be, clearly responsible for the rest; and the amount of this would still be such as to make the responsibility very considerable. Though government has but little power in the direct and immediate relief of poverty, yet its indirect influence on the prosperity of its subjects is striking and incontestable. And the reason is, that though it is comparatively impotent in its efforts to make the food of a country keep pace with an unrestricted increase of population, yet its influence is great in giving the best direction to those checks, which in some form or other must necessarily take place. It has clearly appeared in the former part of this work, that the most despotic and worst-governed countries, however low they might be in actual population, were uniformly the most populous in proportion to their means of subsistence; and the necessary effect of this state of things must of course be very low wages. In such countries the checks to population arise more from the sickness and mortality consequent on poverty, than from the prudence and foresight which restrain the frequency

and universality of early marriages. The checks are more of the positive and less of the preventive kind.

The first grand requisite to the growth of prudential habits is the perfect security of property; and the next perhaps is that respectability and importance, which are given to the lower classes by equal laws, and the possession of some influence in the framing of them. The more excellent therefore is the government, the more does it tend to generate that prudence and elevation of sentiment, by which alone in the present state of our being poverty can be avoided.

It has been sometimes asserted that the only reason why it is advantageous that the people should have some share in the government, is that a representation of the people tends best to secure the framing of good and equal laws; but that, if the same object could be attained under a despotism, the same advantage would accrue to the community. If however the representative system, by securing to the lower classes of society a more equal and liberal mode of treatment

treatment from their superiors, gives to each individual a greater personal respectabilty, and a greater fear of personal degradation; it is evident that it will powerfully co-operate with the security of property in animating the exertions of industry, and in generating habits of prudence; and thus more powerfully tend to increase the riches and prosperity of the lower classes of the community, than if the same laws had existed under a despotism.

But though the tendency of a free constitution and a good government to diminish poverty be certain; yet their effect in this way must necessarily be indirect and slow, and very different from the direct and immediate relief, which the lower classes of people are too frequently in the habit of looking forward to as the consequence of a revolution. This habit of expecting too much, and the irritation occasioned by disappointment, continually give a wrong direction to their efforts in favour of liberty, and constantly tend to defeat the accomplishment of those gradual reforms in government, and that slow melioration of the

condition of the lower classes of society, which are really attainable.

It is of the very highest importance therefore, to know distinctly what government cannot do, as well as what it can. If I were called upon to name the cause, which, in my conception, had more than any other contributed to the very slow progress of freedom, so disheartening to every liberal mind, I should say that it was the confusion that had existed respecting the causes of the unhappiness and discontents which prevail in society; and the advantage which governments had been able to take, and indeed had been compelled to take, of this confusion, to confirm and strengthen their power. I cannot help thinking therefore, that a knowledge generally circulated, that the principal cause of want and unhappiness is only indirectly connected with government, and totally beyond its power directly to remove; and that it depends upon the conduct of the poor themselves; would, instead of giving any advantage to governments, give a great additional weight to the popular side of the question,

by

by removing the dangers with which from ignorance it is at present accompanied; and thus tend, in a very powerful manner, to promote the cause of rational freedom.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII

Continuation of the same Subject [a].

THE reasonings of the foregoing chapter have been strikingly confirmed by the events of the last two or three years. Perhaps there never was a period when more erroneous views were formed by the lower classes of society of the effects to be expected from reforms in the government, when these erroneous views were more immediately founded on a total misapprehension of the principal cause of poverty, and when they more directly led to results unfavourable to liberty.

One of the main causes of complaint against the government has been, that a considerable number of labourers, who are both able and willing to work, are wholly out of employment, and unable consequently to command the necessaries of life.

[a] Written in 1817.

That

That this state of things is one of the most afflicting events that can occur in civilized life, that it is a natural and pardonable cause of discontent among the lower classes of society, and that every effort should be made by the higher classes to mitigate it, consistently with a proper care not to render it permanent, no man of humanity can doubt. But that such a state of things may occur in the best-conducted and most economical government that ever existed is as certain, as that governments have not the power of commanding with effect the resources of a country to be progressive, when they are naturally stationary or declining.

It will be allowed that periods of prosperity may occur in any well-governed state, during which an extraordinary stimulus may be given to its wealth and population, which cannot in its nature be permanent. If, for instance, new channels of trade are opened, new colonies are possessed, new inventions take place in machinery, and new and great improvements are made in agriculture, it is quite obvious that

while

while the markets at home and abroad will readily take off at advantageous prices the increasing produce, there must be a rapid increase of capital, and an unusual stimulus given to the population. On the other hand, if subsequently these channels of trade are either closed by accident or contracted by foreign competition; if colonies are lost, or the same produce is supplied from other quarters; if the markets, either from glut or competition, cease to extend with the extension of the new machinery; and if the improvements in agriculture from any cause whatever cease to be progressive, it is as obvious that, just at the time when the stimulus to population has produced its greatest effect, the means of employing and supporting this population may, in the natural course of things, and without any fault whatever in the government, become deficient. This failure must unavoidably produce great distress among the labouring classes of society; but it is quite clear that no inference can be drawn from this distress that a radical change is required in the government; and the attempt to accomplish such

such a change might only aggravate the evil.

It has been supposed in this case, that the government has in no respect by its conduct contributed to the pressure in question, a supposition which in practice perhaps will rarely be borne out by the fact. It is unquestionably in the power of a government to produce great distress by war and taxation, and it requires some skill to distinguish the distress which is the natural result of these causes, from that which is occasioned in the way just described. In our own case unquestionably both descriptions of causes have combined, but the former in a greater degree than the latter. War and taxation, as far as they operate directly and simply, tend to destroy or retard the progress of capital, produce and population; but during the late war these checks to prosperity have been much more than overbalanced by a combination of circumstances which has given an extraordinary stimulus to production. That for this overbalance of advantages the country cannot be considered as much indebted to the

the government, is most certain. The government during the last twenty-five years has shewn no very great love either of peace or liberty; and no particular economy in the use of the national resources. It has proceeded in a very straight-forward manner to spend great sums in war, and to raise them by very heavy taxes. It has no doubt done its part towards the dilapidation of the national resources. But still the broad fact must stare every impartial observer in the face, that at the end of the war in 1814 the national resources were not dilapidated; and that not only were the wealth and population of the country considerably greater than they were at the commencement of the war, but that they had increased in the interval at a more rapid rate than was ever experienced before.

Perhaps this may justly be considered as one of the most extraordinary facts in history; and it certainly follows from it, that the sufferings of the country since the peace have not been occasioned so much by the usual and most natural effects to be expected

expected from war and taxation, as by the sudden ceasing of an extraordinary stimulus to production, the distresses consequent upon which, though increased no doubt by the weight of taxation, do not essentially arise from it, and are not directly therefore, and immediately, to be relieved by its removal.

That the labouring classes of society should not be fully aware that the main causes of their distress are to a certain extent and for a certain time, irremediable, is natural enough; and that they should listen much more readily and willingly to those who confidently promise immediate relief, rather than to those who can only tell them unpalatable truths, is by no means surprising. But it must be allowed that full advantage has been taken by the popular orators and writers of a crisis which has given them so much power. Partly from ignorance, and partly from design, every thing that could tend to enlighten the labouring classes as to the real nature of their situation, and encourage them to bear

bear an unavoidable pressure with patience, has been either sedulously kept out of their view, or clamorously reprobated; and every thing that could tend to deceive them, to aggravate and encourage their discontents, and to raise unreasonable and extravagant expectations as to the relief to be expected from reform, has been as sedulously brought forward. If under these circumstances the reforms proposed had been accomplished, it is impossible that the people should not have been most cruelly disappointed; and under a system of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, a general disappointment of the people would probably lead to every sort of experiment in government, till the career of change was stopped by a military despotism. The warmest friends of genuine liberty might justly feel alarmed at such a prospect. To a cause conducted upon such principles, and likely to be attended with such results, they could not of course, consistently with their duty, lend any assistance. And, if with great difficulty, and against the sense of the great mass

mass of petitioners, they were to effect a more moderate and more really useful reform, they could not but feel certain that the unavoidable disappointment of the people would be attributed to the half-measures which had been pursued; and that they would be either forced to proceed to more radical changes, or submit to a total loss of their influence and popularity by stopping short while the distresses of the people were unrelieved, their discontents unallayed, and the great *panacea* on which they had built their sanguine expectations untried.

These considerations have naturally paralyzed the exertions of the best friends of liberty; and those salutary reforms which are acknowledged to be necessary in order to repair the breaches of time, and improve the fabric of our constitution, are thus rendered much more difficult, and consequently much less probable.

But not only have the false expectations and extravagant demands suggested by the leaders of the people given an easy victory to government over every proposition for reform,

reform, whether violent or moderate, but they have furnished the most fatal instruments of offensive attack against the constitution itself. They are naturally calculated to excite some alarm, and to check moderate reform; but alarm, when once excited, seldom knows where to stop, and the causes of it are particularly liable to be exaggerated. There is reason to believe that it has been under the influence of exaggerated statements, and of inferences drawn by exaggerated fears from these statements, that acts unfavourable to liberty have been passed without an adequate necessity. But the power of creating these exaggerated fears, and of passing these acts, has been unquestionably furnished by the extravagant expectations of the people. And it must be allowed that the present times furnish a very striking illustration of the doctrine, that an ignorance of the principal cause of poverty is peculiarly unfavourable, and that a knowledge of it must be peculiarly favourable, to the cause of civil liberty.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

Plan of the gradual Abolition of the Poor Laws proposed.

IF the principles in the preceding chapters should stand the test of examination, and we should ever feel the obligation of endeavouring to act upon them, the next inquiry would be, in what way we ought practically to proceed. The first grand obstacle which presents itself in this country is the system of the poor-laws, which has been justly stated to be an evil, in comparison of which the national debt, with all its magnitude of terror, is of little moment *. The rapidity with which the poor's rates have increased of late years presents us indeed with the prospect of such an extraordinary proportion of paupers in the society, as would seem to be incredible in a nation

* Reports of the Society for bettering the Condition of the Poor, vol. iii. p. 21.

flourishing

flourishing in arts, agriculture and commerce, and with a government which has generally been allowed to be the best that has hitherto stood the test of experience[a].

Greatly as we may be shocked at such a prospect, and ardently as we may wish to remove it, the evil is now so deeply seated, and the relief given by the poor-laws so widely extended, that no man of humanity could venture to propose their immediate abolition. To mitigate their effects however, and stop their future increase, to which, if left to continue upon their present plan, we can see no probable termination, it has been proposed to fix the whole sum to be raised at its present rate, or any other that might be determined upon; and to make a law, that on no account this sum should be exceeded. The objection to this plan is, that a very large sum would be

[a] If the poor's rates continue increasing as rapidly as they have done on the average of the last ten years, how melancholy are our future prospects! The system of the poor-laws has been justly stated by the French to be *la plaie politique de l'Angleterre la plus devorante.* (Comité de Mendicité.)

still

still to be raised, and a great number of people to be supported; the consequence of which would be, that the poor would not be easily able to distinguish the alteration that had been made. Each individual would think that he had as good a right to be supported when he was in want as any other person; and those who unfortunately chanced to be in distress, when the fixed sum had been collected, would think themselves particularly ill used on being excluded from all assistance, while so many others were enjoying this advantage. If the sum collected were divided among all that were in want, however their numbers might increase, though such a plan would not be so unfair with regard to those who became dependent after the sum had been fixed, it would undoubtedly be very hard upon those who had been in the habit of receiving a more liberal supply, and had done nothing to justify its being taken from them; and in both cases it would certainly be unjust in the society to undertake the support of the poor, and yet, if their numbers increased, to feed them so sparingly,

that they must necessarily die of hunger and disease.

I have reflected much on the subject of the poor-laws, and hope therefore that I shall be excused in venturing to suggest a mode of their gradual abolition, to which I confess that at present I can see no material objection. Of this indeed I feel nearly convinced, that, should we ever become so sufficiently sensible of the wide-spreading tyranny, dependence, indolence and unhappiness which they create, as seriously to make an effort to abolish them, we shall be compelled by a sense of justice to adopt the principle, if not the plan, which I shall mention. It seems impossible to get rid of so extensive a system of support, consistently with humanity, without applying ourselves directly to its vital principle, and endeavouring to counteract that deeply-seated cause which occasions the rapid growth of all such establishments, and invariably renders them inadequate to their object. As a previous step even to any considerable alteration in the present system, which would contract or stop the increase

increase of the relief to be given, it appears to me that we are bound in justice and honour formally to disclaim the *right* of the poor to support.

To this end, I should propose a regulation to be made, declaring, that no child born from any marriage, taking place after the expiration of a year from the date of the law, and no illegitimate child born two years from the same date, should ever be entitled to parish assistance. And to give a more general knowledge of this law, and to enforce it more strongly on the minds of the lower classes of people, the clergyman of each parish should, after the publication of banns, read a short address, stating the strong obligation on every man to support his own children; the impropriety, and even immorality, of marrying without a prospect of being able to do this; the evils which had resulted to the poor themselves from the attempt which had been made to assist by public institutions in a duty which ought to be exclusively appropriated to parents; and the absolute necessity which had at length appeared of abandoning all

such institutions, on account of their producing effects totally opposite to those which were intended.

This would operate as a fair, distinct and precise notice, which no man could well mistake; and, without pressing hard on any particular individuals, would at once throw off the rising generation from that miserable and helpless dependence upon the government and the rich, the moral as well as physical consequences of which are almost incalculable.

After the public notice which I have proposed had been given, and the system of poor-laws had ceased with regard to the rising generation, if any man chose to marry, without a prospect of being able to support a family, he should have the most perfect liberty so to do. Though to marry, in this case, is, in my opinion, clearly an immoral act, yet it is not one which society can justly take upon itself to prevent or punish; because the punishment provided for it by the laws of nature falls directly and most severely upon the individual who commits the act, and through him, only more remotely

motely and feebly, on the society. When Nature will govern and punish for us, it is a very miserable ambition to wish to snatch the rod from her hands, and draw upon ourselves the odium of executioner. To the punishment therefore of Nature he should be left, the punishment of want. He has erred in the face of a most clear and precise warning, and can have no just reason to complain of any person but himself when he feels the consequences of his error. All parish assistance should be denied him; and he should be left to the uncertain support of private charity. He should be taught to know, that the laws of Nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to suffer for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of *right* on society for the smallest portion of food, beyond that which his labour would fairly purchase; and that if he and his family were saved from feeling the natural consequences of his imprudence, he would owe it to the pity of some kind benefactor, to whom, therefore, he ought to be bound by the strongest ties of gratitude.

If

If this system were pursued, we need be under no apprehensions that the number of persons in extreme want would be beyond the power and the will of the benevolent to supply. The sphere for the exercise of private charity would, probably not be greater than it is at present; and the principal difficulty would be, to restrain the hand of benevolence from assisting those in distress in so indiscriminate a manner as to encourage indolence and want of foresight in others.

With regard to illegitimate children, after the proper notice had been given, they should not be allowed to have any claim to parish assistance, but be left entirely to the support of private charity. If the parents desert their child, they ought to be made answerable for the crime. The infant is, comparatively speaking, of little value to the society, as others will immediately supply its place. Its principal value is on account of its being the object of one of the most delightful passions in human nature—parental affection. But if this value be disregarded by those who are alone in a capacity

capacity to feel it, the society cannot be called upon to put itself in their place; and has no further business in its protection than to punish the crime of desertion or intentional ill treatment in the persons whose duty it is to provide for it.

At present the child is taken under the protection of the parish*, and generally dies, at least in London, within the first year. The loss to the society is the same; but the crime is diluted by the number of people concerned, and the death passes as a visitation of Providence, instead of being considered as the necessary consequence of the conduct of its parents, for which they ought to be held responsible to God and to society.

The desertion of both parents, however, is not so common as the desertion of one. When a servant or labouring man has an illegitimate child, his running away is per-

* I fully agree with Sir F. M. Eden, in thinking that the constant public support which deserted children receive is the cause of their very great numbers in the two most opulent countries of Europe, France and England. State of the Poor, vol. i. p. 339.

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fectly a matter of course; and it is by no means uncommon for a man who has a wife and large family to withdraw into a distant county, and leave them to the parish; indeed I once heard a hard-working good sort of man propose to do this, as the best mode of providing for a wife and six children[a]. If the simple fact of these frequent desertions were related in some countries, a strange inference would be drawn against the English character; but the wonder would cease when our public institutions were explained.

By the laws of nature, a child is confided directly and exclusively to the protection of its parents. By the laws of nature, the mother of a child is confided almost as strongly and exclusively to the man who is the father of it. If these ties were suffered to remain in the state in which nature has left them, and the man were convinced that the

[a] "That many of the poorer classes of the community "avail themselves of the liberality of the law, and leave "their wives and children on the parish, the reader will "find abundant proof in the subsequent part of this "work." Sir F. M. Eden on the State of the Poor, vol. i. p. 339.

woman

woman and the child depended solely upon him for support, I scarcely believe that there are ten men breathing so atrocious as to desert them. But our laws, in opposition to the laws of nature, say, that if the parents forsake their child, other persons will undertake to support it; or, if the man forsake the woman, that she shall still meet with protection elsewhere; that is, we take all possible pains to weaken and render null the ties of nature, and then say that men are unnatural. But the fact is, that the society itself, in its body politic, is the unnatural character, for framing laws that thus counteract the laws of nature, and give premiums to the violation of the best and most honourable feelings of the human heart.

It is a common thing in most parishes, when the father of an illegitimate child can be seized, to endeavour to frighten him into marriage by the terrors of a jail; but such a proceeding cannot surely be too strongly reprobated. In the first place, it is a most shallow policy in the parish officers; for, if they succeed, the effect upon the present system

system will generally be, the having three or four children to provide for, instead of one. And in the next place, it is difficult to conceive a more gross and scandalous profanation of a religious ceremony. Those who believe that the character of a woman is restored by such a forced engagement, or that the moral worth of the man is enhanced by affirming a lie before God, have, I confess, very different ideas of delicacy and morality from those which I have been taught to consider as just. If a man deceive a woman into a connexion with him under a promise of marriage, he has undoubtedly been guilty of a most atrocious act, and there are few crimes which merit a more severe punishment; but the last that I should choose is that which will oblige him to affirm another falsehood, which will probably render the woman that he is to be joined to miserable, and will burden the society with a family of paupers.

The obligation on every man to support his children, whether legitimate or illegitimate, is so clear and strong, that it would be just to arm society with any power to enforce

enforce it, which would be likely to answer the purpose. But I am inclined to believe that no exercise of the civil power, however rigorous, would be half so effectual as a knowledge generally circulated, that children were in future to depend solely for support upon their parents, and would be left only to casual charity if they were deserted.

It may appear to be hard that a mother and her children, who have been guilty of no particular crime themselves, should suffer for the ill conduct of the father; but this is one of the invariable laws of nature; and, knowing this, we should think twice upon the subject, and be very sure of the ground on which we go, before we presume *systematically* to counteract it.

I have often heard the goodness of the Deity impeached on account of that part of the Decalogue in which he declares that he will visit the sins of the father upon the children; but the objection has not perhaps been sufficiently considered. Without a most complete and fundamental change in the whole constitution of human nature; without

without making man an angel, or at least something totally different from what he is at present; it seems absolutely necessary that such a law should prevail. Would it not require a perpetual miracle, which is perhaps a contradiction in terms, to prevent children from being affected in their moral and civil condition by the conduct of their parents? What man is there, that has been brought up by his parents, who is not at the present moment enjoying something from their virtues, or suffering something from their vices; who, in his moral character, has not been elevated in some degree by their prudence, their justice, their benevolence, their temperance, or depressed by the contraries; who, in his civil condition, has not been raised by their reputation, their foresight, their industry, their good fortune, or lowered by their want of character, their imprudence, their indolence, and their adversity? And how much does a knowledge of this transmission of blessings contribute to excite and invigorate virtuous exertion? Proceeding upon this certainty, how ardent and incessant are the efforts

efforts of parents to give their children a good education, and to provide for their future situation in the world! If a man could neglect or desert his wife and children without their suffering any injury, how many individuals there are, who, not being very fond of their wives, or being tired of the shackles of matrimony, would withdraw from household cares and difficulties, and resume their liberty and independence as single men! But the consideration that children may suffer for the faults of their parents has a strong hold even upon vice; and many who are in such a state of mind, as to disregard the consequences of their habitual course of life, as far as relates to themselves, are yet greatly anxious that their children should not suffer from their vices and follies. In the moral government of the world, it seems evidently necessary, that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children; and if in our overweening vanity we imagine, that we can govern a private society better by endeavouring *systematically* to counteract this law,

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I am inclined to believe, that we shall find ourselves very greatly mistaken.

If the plan which I have proposed were adopted, the poor's rates in a few years would begin very rapidly to decrease, and in no great length of time would be completely extinguished; and yet, as far as it appears to me at present, no individual would be either deceived or injured, and consequently no person could have a just right to complain.

The abolition of the poor-laws however is not of itself sufficient; and the obvious answer to those who lay too much stress upon this system is, to desire them to look at the state of the poor in some other countries where such laws do not prevail, and to compare it with their condition in England. But this comparison, it must be acknowledged, is in many respects unfair; and would by no means decide the question of the utility or inutility of such a system. England possesses very great natural and political advantages, in which perhaps the countries, that we should in this case compare

pare with her, would be found to be palpably deficient. The nature of her soil and climate is such, that those almost universal failures in the crops of grain, which are known in some countries, never occur in England. Her insular situation and extended commerce are peculiarly favourable for importation. Her numerous manufactures employ nearly all the hands that are not engaged in agriculture, and afford the means of a regular distribution of the annual produce of the land and labour to the whole of her inhabitants. But, above all, throughout a very large class of the people, a decided taste for the conveniencies and comforts of life, a strong desire of bettering their condition (that master-spring of public prosperity), and, in consequence, a most laudable spirit of industry and foresight, are observed to prevail. These dispositions, so contrary to the hopeless indolence remarked in despotic countries, are generated by the constitution of the English government, and the excellence of its laws, which secure to every individual the produce of his industry. When, therefore, on a comparison

parison with other countries, England appears to have the advantage in the state of her poor, the superiority is entirely to be attributed to these favourable circumstances, and not to the poor-laws. A woman with one bad feature may greatly excel in beauty some other, who may have this individual feature tolerably good; but it would be rather strange to assert, in consequence, that the superior beauty of the former was occasioned by this particular deformity. The poor-laws have constantly tended to counteract the natural and acquired advantages of this country. Fortunately these advantages have been so considerable, that though weakened they could not be overcome; and to these advantages, together with the checks to marriage, which the laws themselves create, it is owing that England has been able to bear up so long against this pernicious system. Probably there is not any other country in the world, except perhaps Holland before the revolution, which could have acted upon it so completely for the same period of time, without utter ruin.

It

It has been proposed by some to establish poor-laws in Ireland; but from the depressed state of the common people, there is little reason to doubt, that, on the establishment of such laws, the whole of the landed property would very soon be absorbed, or the system be given up in despair.

In Sweden, from the dearths which are not unfrequent, owing to the general failure of crops in an unpropitious climate and the impossibility of great importations in a poor country, an attempt to establish a system of parochial relief such as that in England (if it were not speedily abandoned from the physical impossibility of executing it) would level the property of the kingdom from one end to the other, and convulse the social system in such a manner, as absolutely to prevent it from recovering its former state on the return of plenty.

Even in France, with all her advantages of situation and climate, the tendency to population is so great, and the want of foresight among the lower classes of the people so remarkable, that if poor-laws were esta-

blished, the landed property would soon sink under the burden, and the wretchedness of the people at the same time be increased. On these considerations the committee *de Mendicité*, at the beginning of the revolution, very properly and judiciously rejected the establishment of such a system, which had been proposed.

The exception of Holland, if it were an exception, would arise from very particular circumstances—her extensive foreign trade and her numerous colonial emigrations, compared with the smallness of her territory, together with the extreme unhealthiness of a great part of the country, which occasions a much greater average mortality than is common in other states. These, I conceive, were the unobserved causes which principally contributed to render Holland so famous for the management of her poor, and able to employ and support all who applied for relief.

No part of Germany is sufficiently rich to support an extensive system of parochial relief; but I am inclined to think, that from the absence of it the lower classes of the people

people, in some parts of Germany, are in a better situation than those of the same class in England. In Switzerland, for the same reason, their condition, before the late troubles, was perhaps universally superior. And in a journey through the duchies of Holstein and Sleswick belonging to Denmark, the houses of the lower classes of people appeared to me to be neater and better, and in general there were fewer indications of poverty and wretchedness among them, than among the same ranks in this country.

Even in Norway, notwithstanding the disadvantage of a severe and uncertain climate, from the little that I saw in a few weeks' residence in the country, and the information that I could collect from others, I am inclined to think that the poor are, on the average, better off than in England. Their houses and clothing are often superior; and though they have no white bread, they have much more meat, fish and milk than our labourers; and I particularly remarked, that the farmers' boys were much stouter and healthier looking lads than those of the

same description in England. This degree of happiness, superior to what could be expected from the soil and climate, arises almost exclusively from the degree in which the preventive check to population operates; and the establishment of a system of poor-laws, which would destroy this check, would at once sink the lower classes of the people into a state of the most miserable poverty and wretchedness; would diminish their industry, and consequently the produce of the land and labour of the country; would weaken the resources of ingenuity in times of scarcity; and ultimately involve the country in all the horrors of continual famines.

If, as in Ireland, Spain, and many of the southern countries, the people are in so degraded a state, as to propagate their species without regard to consequences, it matters little whether they have poor-laws or not. Misery in all its various forms must be the predominant check to their increase. Poor-laws, indeed, will always tend to aggravate the evil, by diminishing the general resources of the country; and

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in such a state of things can exist only for a very short time; but with or without them, no stretch of human ingenuity and exertion can rescue the people from the most extreme poverty and wretchedness.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

Of the Modes of correcting the prevailing Opinions on Population.

IT is not enough to abolish all the positive institutions which encourage population; but we must endeavour, at the same time, to correct the prevailing opinions which have the same, or perhaps even a more powerful effect. This must necessarily be a work of time; and can only be done by circulating juster notions on these subjects, in writings and conversation; and by endeavouring to impress as strongly as possible on the public mind, that it is not the duty of man simply to propagate his species, but to propagate virtue and happiness; and that, if he has not a tolerably fair prospect of doing this, he is by no means called upon to leave descendants.

Among the higher ranks of society, we have not much reason to apprehend the too great

great frequency of marriage. Though the circulation of juster notions on this subject might, even in this part of the community, do much good, and prevent many unhappy marriages; yet whether we make particular exertions for this purpose or not, we may rest assured that the degree of proper pride and spirit of independence almost invariably connected with education and a certain rank in life will secure the operation of the prudential check to marriage to a considerable extent. All that the society can reasonably require of its members is, that they should not have families without being able to support them. This may be fairly enjoined as a positive duty. Every restraint beyond this must be considered as a matter of choice and taste; but from what we already know of the habits which prevail among the higher ranks of life, we have reason to think that little more is wanted to attain the object required, than to award a greater degree of respect and of personal liberty to single women, and to place them nearer upon a level with married women;—a change, which, independently

dently of any particular purpose in view, the plainest principles of equity seem to demand.

If, among the higher classes of society, the object of securing the operation of the prudential check to marriage to a sufficient degree appear to be attainable without much difficulty, the obvious mode of proceeding with the lower classes of society, where the point is of the principal importance, is to endeavour to infuse into them a portion of that knowledge and foresight, which so much facilitates the attainment of this object in the educated part of the community.

The fairest chance of accomplishing this end would probably be by the establishmant of a system of parochial education upon a plan similar to that proposed by Adam Smith[a]. In addition to the usual subjects of instruction, and those which he has mentioned, I should be disposed to lay considerable stress on the frequent explanation of the real state of the lower classes of society, as affected by the principle of

[a] Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. v. c. i. p. 187.

population,

population, and their consequent dependence on themselves for the chief part of their happiness or misery. It would be by no means necessary or proper in these explanations to underrate, in the smallest degree, the desirableness of marriage. It should always be represented as, what it really is, a state peculiarly suited to the nature of man, and calculated greatly to advance his happiness and remove the temptations to vice; but, like property or any other desirable object, its advantages should be shewn to be unattainable, except under certain conditions. And a strong conviction in a young man of the great desirableness of marriage, with a conviction at the same time that the power of supporting a family was the only condition which would enable him really to enjoy its blessings, would be the most effectual motive imaginable to industry and sobriety before marriage, and would powerfully urge him to save that superfluity of income which single labourers necessarily possess, for the accomplishment of a rational and desirable object, instead of dissipating it,

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as is now usually done, in idleness and vice.

If in the course of time a few of the simplest principles of political economy could be added to the instructions given in these schools, the benefit to society would be almost incalculable*. In some conversations

* Adam Smith proposes, that the elementary parts of geometry and mechanics should be taught in these parish schools; and I cannot help thinking, that the common principles by which markets are regulated might be made sufficiently clear, to be of considerable use. It is certainly a subject that, as it interests the lower classes of people very nearly, would be likely to attract their attention. At the same time it must be confessed, that it is impossible to be in any degree sanguine on this point, recollecting how very ignorant in general the educated part of the community is of these principles. If, however, political economy cannot be taught to the common people, I really think that it ought to form a branch of University education. Scotland has set us an example in this respect, which we ought not to be so slow to imitate. It is of the utmost importance, that the gentlemen of the country, and particularly the clergy, should not from ignorance aggravate the evils of scarcity, every time that it unfortunately occurs. During the late dearths, half of the gentlemen and clergymen in the kingdom richly deserved to have been prosecuted for sedition. After inflaming the minds of the common people against the farmers

tions with labouring men, during the late scarcities [a], I confess that I was to the last degree disheartened, at observing their inveterate prejudices on the subject of grain; and I felt very strongly the almost absolute incompatibility of a government really free with such a degree of ignorance. The delusions are of such a nature, that, if acted upon, they must at all events be repressed by force; and it is extremely difficult to give such a power to the government as will be sufficient at all times for this purpose, without the risk of its being employed improperly, and endangering the liberty of the subject.

We have lavished immense sums on the

farmers and corn-dealers, by the manner in which they talked of them or preached about them, it was but a feeble antidote to the poison which they had infused, coldly to observe that, however the poor might be oppressed or cheated, it was their duty to keep the peace. It was little better than Antony's repeated declaration, that the conspirators were all honourable men; which did not save either their houses or their persons from the attacks of the mob. Political economy is perhaps the only science, of which it may be said that the ignorance of it is not merely a deprivation of good, but produces great positive evil.

[a] 1800 and 1801.

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poor, which we have every reason to think have constantly tended to aggravate their misery. But in their education and in the circulation of those important political truths that most nearly concern them, which are perhaps the only means in our power of really raising their condition, and of making them happier men and more peaceable subjects, we have been miserably deficient. It is surely a great national disgrace, that the education of the lower classes of people in England should be left merely to a few Sunday schools, supported by a subscription from individuals, who can give to the course of instruction in them any kind of bias which they please. And even the improvement of Sunday schools (for, objectionable as they are in some points of view, and imperfect in all, I cannot but consider them as an improvement) is of very late date[a].

The arguments which have been urged against instructing the people appear to me to be not only illiberal, but to the last degree feeble; and they ought, on the con-

[a] Written in 1803.

trary,

trary, to be extremely forcible, and to be supported by the most obvious and striking necessity, to warrant us in withholding the means of raising the condition of the lower classes of people, when they are in our power. Those who will not listen to any answer to these arguments drawn from theory, cannot, I think, refuse the testimony of experience; and I would ask, whether the advantage of superior instruction which the lower classes of people in Scotland are known to possess, has appeared to have any tendency towards creating a spirit of tumult and discontent amongst them. And yet, from the natural inferiority of its soil and climate, the pressure of want is more constant, and the dearths are not only more frequent, but more dreadful than in England. In the case of Scotland, the knowledge circulated among the common people, though not sufficient essentially to better their condition by increasing, in an adequate degree, their habits of prudence and foresight, has yet the effect of making them bear with patience the evils which they suffer, from being aware of the folly

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and inefficacy of turbulence. The quiet and peaceable habits of the instructed Scotch peasant, compared with the turbulent disposition of the ignorant Irishman, ought not to be without effect upon every impartial reasoner.

The principal argument that I have heard advanced against a system of national education in England is, that the common people would be put in a capacity to read such works as those of Paine, and that the consequences would probably be fatal to government. But on this subject I agree most cordially with Adam Smith* in thinking, that an instructed and well-informed people would be much less likely to be led away by inflammatory writings, and much better able to detect the false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues, than an ignorant people. One or two readers in a parish are sufficient to circulate any quantity of sedition; and if these be gained to the democratic side, they will probably have the power of doing much more mischief, by selecting the passages

* Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. v. c. i. p. 192.

best

best suited to their hearers, and choosing the moments when their oratory is likely to have the most effect, than if each individual in the parish had been in a capacity to read and judge of the whole work himself; and at the same time to read and judge of the opposing arguments, which we may suppose would also reach him.

But in addition to this, a double weight would undoubtedly be added to the observation of Adam Smith, if these schools were made the means of instructing the people in the real nature of their situation; if they were taught, what is really true, that without an increase of their own industry and prudence no change of government could essentially better their condition; that, though they might get rid of some particular grievance, yet in the great point of supporting their families they would be but little, or perhaps not at all benefitted; that a revolution would not alter in their favour the proportion of the supply of labour to the demand, or the quantity of food to the number of the consumers; and that if the supply of labour were greater than

than the demand, and the demand for food greater than the supply, they might suffer the utmost severity of want, under the freest, the most perfect, and best executed government, that the human imagination could conceive.

A knowledge of these truths so obviously tends to promote peace and quietness, to weaken the effect of inflammatory writings and to prevent all unreasonable and ill-directed opposition to the constituted authorities, that those who would still object to the instruction of the people may fairly be suspected of a wish to encourage their ignorance, as a pretext for tyranny, and an opportunity of increasing the power and the influence of the executive government.

Besides explaining the real situation of the lower classes of society, as depending principally upon themselves for their happiness or misery, the parochial schools would, by early instruction and the judicious distribution of rewards, have the fairest chance of training up the rising generation in habits of sobriety, industry, independence and prudence, and in a proper discharge

discharge of their religious duties; which would raise them from their present degraded state, and approximate them, in some degree, to the middle classes of society, whose habits, generally speaking, are certainly superior.

In most countries, among the lower classes of people, there appears to be something like a standard of wretchedness, a point below which they will not continue to marry and propagate their species. This standard is different in different countries, and is formed by various concurring circumstances of soil, climate, government, degree of knowledge and civilization, &c. The principal circumstances which contribute to raise it are liberty, security of property, the diffusion of knowledge, and a taste for the conveniences and the comforts of life. Those which contribute principally to lower it are despotism and ignorance.

In an attempt to better the condition of the lower classes of society, our object should be to raise this standard as high as possible, by cultivating a spirit of independence, a decent pride, and a taste for

cleanliness and comfort. The effect of a good government in increasing the prudential habits and personal respectability of the lower classes of society has already been insisted on; but certainly this effect will always be incomplete without a good system of education; and indeed it may be said that no government can approach to perfection, that does not provide for the instruction of the people. The benefits derived from education are among those, which may be enjoyed without restriction of numbers; and as it is in the power of governments to confer these benefits, it is undoubtedly their duty to do it.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

Of the Direction of our Charity.

AN important and interesting inquiry yet remains, relating to the mode of directing our private charity, so as not to interfere with the great object in view, of meliorating the condition of the lower classes of people, by preventing the population from pressing too hard against the limits of the means of subsistence.

The emotion which prompts us to relieve our fellow-creatures in distress is, like all our other natural passions, general, and in some degree indiscriminate and blind. Our feelings of compassion may be worked up to a higher pitch by a well-wrought scene in a play, or a fictitious tale in a novel, than by almost any events in real life: and if among ten petitioners we were to listen only to the first impulses of our feelings without making further inquiries, we should

undoubtedly give our assistance to the best actor of the party. It is evident therefore, that the impulse of benevolence, like the impulses of love, of anger, of ambition, the desire of eating and drinking, or any other of our natural propensities, must be regulated by experience, and frequently brought to the test of utility, or it will defeat its intended purpose.

The apparent object of the passion between the sexes is the continuation of the species, and the formation of such an intimate union of views and interests between two persons as will best promote their happiness, and at the same time secure the proper degree of attention to the helplessness of infancy and the education of the rising generation; but if every man were to obey at all times the impulses of nature in the gratification of this passion, without regard to consequences, the principal part of these important objects would not be attained, and even the continuation of the species might be defeated by a promiscuous intercourse.

The apparent end of the impulse of benevolence

nevolence is, to draw the whole human race together, but more particularly that part of it which is of our own nation and kindred, in the bonds of brotherly love; and by giving men an interest in the happiness and misery of their fellow-creatures, to prompt them, as they have power, to mitigate the partial evils arising from general laws, and thus to increase the sum of human happiness; but if our benevolence be indiscriminate, and the degree of apparent distress be made the sole measure of our liberality, it is evident that it will be exercised almost exclusively upon common beggars, while modest unobtrusive merit, struggling with unavoidable difficulties, yet still maintaining some slight appearances of decency and cleanliness, will be totally neglected. We shall raise the worthless above the worthy; we shall encourage indolence and check industry; and in the most marked manner subtract from the sum of human happiness.

Our experience has indeed informed us that the impulse of benevolence is not so strong as the passion between the sexes, and that, generally speaking, there is much

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less danger to be apprehended from the indulgence of the former than of the latter; but independently of this experience and of the moral codes founded upon it, we should be as much justified in a general indulgence of the former passion as in following indiscriminately every impulse of our benevolence. They are both natural passions, excited by their appropriate objects, and to the gratification of which we are prompted by the pleasurable sensations which accompany them. As animals, or till we know their consequences, our only business is to follow these dictates of nature; but as reasonable beings, we are under the strongest obligations to attend to their consequences; and if they be evil to ourselves or others, we may justly consider it as an indication, that such a mode of indulging these passions is not suited to our state or conformable to the will of God. As moral agents therefore, it is clearly our duty to restrain their indulgence in these particular directions; and by thus carefully examining the consequences of our natural passions, and frequently bringing them to the

the test of utility, gradually to acquire a habit of gratifying them only in that way, which, being unattended with evil, will clearly add to the sum of human happiness, and fulfil the apparent purpose of the Creator.

Though utility therefore can never be the immediate excitement to the gratification of any passion, it is the test by which alone we can know, independently of the revealed will of God, whether it ought or ought not to be indulged; and is therefore the surest criterion of moral rules which can be collected from the light of nature. All the moral codes, which have inculcated the subjection of the passions to reason, have been, as I conceive, really built upon this foundation, whether the promulgators of them were aware of it or not.

I remind the reader of these truths, in order to apply them to the habitual direction of our charity; and if we keep the criterion of utility constantly in view, we may find ample room for the exercise of our benevolence, without interfering with the great purpose which we have to accomplish.

One

One of the most valuable parts of charity is its effect upon the giver. It is more blessed to give than to receive. Supposing it to be allowed that the exercise of our benevolence in acts of charity is not, upon the whole, really beneficial to the poor; yet we could never sanction any endeavour to extinguish an impulse, the proper gratification of which has so evident a tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. But it is particularly satisfactory and pleasing to find that the mode of exercising our charity, which, when brought to the test of utility, will appear to be most beneficial to the poor, is precisely that, which will have the best and most improving effect on the mind of the donor.

The quality of charity, like that of mercy,

> " is not strained;
> " It droppeth as the gentle rain from Heav'n
> " Upon the earth beneath."

The immense sums distributed to the poor in this country by the parochial laws are improperly called charity. They want its most distinguishing attribute; and, as might be expected from an attempt to force that which loses its essence the moment it ceases

to

to be voluntary, their effects upon those from whom they are collected are as prejudicial as on those to whom they are distributed. On the side of the receivers of this miscalled charity, instead of real relief, we find accumulated distress and more extended poverty; on the side of the givers, instead of pleasurable sensations, unceasing discontent and irritation.

In the great charitable institutions supported by voluntary contributions, some of which are certainly of a prejudicial tendency, the subscriptions, I am inclined to fear, are sometimes given grudgingly, and rather because they are expected by the world from certain stations and certain fortunes, than because they are prompted by motives of genuine benevolence; and as the greater part of the subscribers do not interest themselves in the management of the funds or in the fate of the particular objects relieved, it is not to be expected that this kind of charity should have any strikingly beneficial influence on the minds of the majority who exercise it.

Even in the relief of common beggars,

we

we shall find that we are often as much influenced by the desire of getting rid of the importunities of a disgusting object, as by the pleasure of relieving it. We wish that it had not fallen in our way, rather than rejoice in the opportunity given us of assisting a fellow-creature. We feel a painful emotion at the sight of so much apparent misery; but the pittance we give does not relieve it. We know that it is totally inadequate to produce any essential effect. We know besides, that we shall be addressed in the same manner at the corner of the next street; and we know that we are liable to the grossest impositions. We hurry therefore sometimes by them, and shut our ears to their importunate demands. We give no more than we can help giving without doing actual violence to our feelings. Our charity is in some degree forced; and, like forced charity, it leaves no satisfactory impression on the mind, and cannot therefore have any very beneficial and improving effect on the heart and affections.

But it is far otherwise with that voluntary and active charity, which makes itself acquainted

acquainted with the objects which it relieves; which seems to feel, and to be proud of the bond that unites the rich with the poor; which enters into their houses, informs itself not only of their wants, but of their habits and dispositions; checks the hopes of clamorous and obtrusive poverty, with no other recommendation but rags; and encourages, with adequate relief, the silent and retiring sufferer, labouring under unmerited difficulties. This mode of exercising our charity presents a very different picture from that of any other; and its contrast with the common mode of parish relief cannot be better described than in the words of Mr. Townsend, in the conclusion of his admirable dissertation on the Poor-Laws. "Nothing in nature can be more disgusting "than a parish pay-table, attendant upon "which, in the same objects of misery, "are too often found combined, snuff, "gin, rags, vermin, insolence and abusive "language; nor in nature can any thing "be more beautiful than the mild compla-"cency of benevolence hastening to the "humble cottage to relieve the wants of "industry

" industry and virtue, to feed the hungry, " to clothe the naked, and to soothe the " sorrows of the widow with her tender " orphans; nothing can be more pleasing, " unless it be their sparkling eyes, their " bursting tears, and their uplifted hands, " the artless expressions of unfeigned gra- " titude for unexpected favours. Such " scenes will frequently occur, whenever " men shall have power to dispose of their " own property."

I conceive it to be almost impossible that any person could be much engaged in such scenes without daily making advances in virtue. No exercise of our affections can have a more evident tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. It is almost exclusively this species of charity that blesseth him that gives; and, in a general view, it is almost exclusively this species of charity which blesseth him that takes; at least it may be asserted that there are but few other modes of exercising our charity, in which large sums can be distributed, without a greater chance of producing evil than good.

The

The discretionary power of giving or withholding relief, which is, to a certain extent, vested in parish officers and justices, is of a very different nature, and will have a very different effect, from the discrimination which may be exercised by voluntary charity. Every man in this country, under certain circumstances, is entitled by law to parish assistance; and unless his disqualification is clearly proved, has a right to complain if it be withheld. The inquiries necessary to settle this point, and the extent of the relief to be granted, too often produce evasion and lying on the part of the petitioner, and afford an opening to partiality and oppression in the overseer. If the proposed relief be given, it is of course received with unthankfulness; and if it be denied, the party generally thinks himself severely aggrieved, and feels resentment and indignation at his treatment.

In the distribution of voluntary charity nothing of this kind can take place. The person who receives it is made the proper subject of the pleasurable sensation of gratitude; and those who do not receive it cannot

cannot possibly conceive themselves in the slightest degree injured. Every man has a right to do what he will with his own, and cannot, in justice, be called upon to render a reason why he gives in the one case, and abstains from it in the other. This kind of despotic power, essential to voluntary charity, gives the greatest facility to the selection of worthy objects of relief, without being accompanied by any ill consequences; and has further a most beneficial effect from the degree of uncertainty which must necessarily be attached to it. It is in the highest degree important to the general happiness of the poor, that no man should look to charity as a fund on which he may confidently depend. He should be taught that his own exertions, his own industry and foresight, are his only just ground of dependence; that if these fail, assistance in his distresses can only be the subject of rational hope; and that even the foundation of this hope will depend in a considerable degree on his own good conduct, and the consciousness that he has not involved himself in these difficulties by his indolence or imprudence.

That

That in the distribution of our charity we are under a strong moral obligation to inculcate this lesson on the poor by a proper discrimination, is a truth of which I cannot feel a doubt. If all could be completely relieved, and poverty banished from the country, even at the expense of three-fourths of the fortunes of the rich, I would be the last to say a single syllable against relieving all, and making the degree of distress alone the measure of our bounty. But as experience has proved, I believe, without a single exception, that poverty and misery have always increased in proportion to the quantity of indiscriminate charity, are we not bound to infer, reasoning as we usually do from the laws of nature, that it is an intimation that such a mode of distribution is not the proper office of benevolence?

The laws of nature say, with St. Paul, "If a man will not work, neither shall he "eat." They also say that he is not rashly to trust to Providence. They appear indeed to be constant and uniform for the express purpose of telling him what he is

to

to trust to, and that, if he marry without a reasonable prospect of supporting a family, he must expect to suffer want. These intimations appear from the constitution of human nature to be absolutely necessary, and to have a strikingly beneficial tendency. If in the direction either of our public or our private charity we say that though a man will not work, yet he shall eat; and though he marry without being able to support a family, yet his family shall be supported; it is evident that we do not merely endeavour to mitigate the partial evils arising from general laws, but *regularly* and *systematically* to counteract the obviously beneficial effects of these general laws themselves. And we cannot easily conceive, that the Deity should implant any passion in the human breast for such a purpose.

In the great course of human events, the best-founded expectations will sometimes be disappointed; and industry, prudence and virtue not only fail of their just reward, but be involved in unmerited calamities. Those who are thus suffering in spite of the best-directed

best-directed endeavours to avoid it, and from causes which they could not be expected to foresee, are the genuine objects of charity. In relieving these, we exercise the appropriate office of benevolence, that of mitigating the partial evils arising from general laws; and in this direction of our charity therefore we need not apprehend any ill consequences. Such objects ought to be relieved, according to our means, liberally and adequately, even though the worthless were in much more severe distress.

When indeed this first claim on our benevolence was satisfied, we might then turn our attention to the idle and improvident; but the interests of human happiness most clearly require, that the relief which we afford them should not be abundant. We may perhaps take upon ourselves, with great caution, to mitigate the punishments which they are suffering from the laws of nature, but on no account to remove them entirely. They are deservedly at the bottom in the scale of society; and if we raise them from this situation, we not only pal-

pably defeat the end of benevolence, but commit a most glaring injustice to those who are above them. They should on no account be enabled to command so much of the necessaries of life, as can be obtained by the wages of common labour.

It is evident that these reasonings do not apply to those cases of urgent distress arising from disastrous accidents, unconnected with habits of indolence and improvidence. If a man break a leg or an arm, we are not to stop to inquire into his moral character before we lend him our assistance; but in this case we are perfectly consistent, and the touchstone of utility completely justifies our conduct. By affording the most indiscriminate assistance in this way, we are in little danger of encouraging people to break their arms and legs. According to the touchstone of utility, the high approbation which Christ gave to the conduct of the good Samaritan, who followed the immediate impulse of his benevolence in relieving a stranger in the urgent distress of an accident, does not, in

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the smallest degree, contradict the expression of St. Paul, " If a man will not work, " neither shall he eat."

We are not however, in any case, to lose a present opportunity of doing good, from the mere supposition that we may meet possibly with a worthier object. In all doubtful cases it may safely be laid down as our duty to follow the natural impulse of our benevolence; but when, in fulfilling our obligations as reasonable beings to attend to the consequences of our actions, we have, from our own experience and that of others, drawn the conclusion that the exercise of our benevolence in one mode is prejudicial, and in another is beneficial in its effects; we are certainly bound, as moral agents, to check our natural propensities in the one direction, and to encourage them and acquire the habits of exercising them in the other.

CHAP. XI.

Different Plans of improving the Condition of the Poor considered.

IN the distribution of our charity, or in any efforts which we may make to better the condition of the lower classes of society, there is another point relating to the main argument of this work, to which we must be particularly attentive. We must on no account do any thing which tends directly to encourage marriage, or to remove, in any regular and systematic manner, that inequality of circumstances which ought always to exist between the single man and the man with a family. The writers who have best understood the principle of population appear to me all to have fallen into very important errors on this point.

Sir James Steuart, who is fully aware of what he calls vicious procreation, and of the misery that attends a redundant population, recommends, notwithstanding, the general

general establishment of foundling hospitals; the taking of children under certain circumstances from their parents, and supporting them at the expense of the state; and particularly laments the inequality of condition between the married and single man, so ill proportioned to their respective wants[a]. He forgets, in these instances, that if, without the encouragement to multiplication of foundling hospitals, or of public support for the children of some married persons, and under the discouragement of great pecuniary disadvantages on the side of the married man, population be still redundant, which is evinced by the inability of the poor to maintain all their children; it is a clear proof that the funds destined for the maintenance of labour cannot properly support a greater population; and that, if further encouragements to multiplication be given and discouragements removed, the result must be, an increase somewhere or other of that vicious procreation, which he so justly reprobates.

Mr. Townsend, who in his Dissertation

[a] Political Economy, vol. i. b. i. c. xiii.

on

on the Poor-Laws has treated this subject with great skill and perspicuity, appears to me to conclude with a proposal, which violates the principles on which he had reasoned so well. He wishes to make the benefit clubs, or friendly societies, which are now voluntarily established in many parishes, compulsory and universal; and proposes as a regulation that an unmarried man should pay a fourth part of his wages, and a married man with four children not more than a thirtieth part[a].

I must first remark that the moment these subscriptions are made compulsory, they will necessarily operate exactly like a direct tax upon labour, which, as Adam Smith justly states, will always be paid, and in a more expensive manner, by the consumer. The landed interest therefore would receive no relief from this plan, but would pay the same sum as at present, only in the advanced price of labour and of commodities, instead of in the parish rates. A compulsory subscription of this kind would have almost all the bad effects of the

[a] Dissertation on the Poor-Laws, p. 89, 2d edit. 1787.

present

present system of relief, and though altered in name would still possess the essential spirit of the poor-laws.

Dean Tucker, in some remarks on a plan of the same kind, proposed by Mr. Pew, observed that, after much talk and reflection on the subject, he had come to the conclusion, that they must be voluntary associations, and not compulsory assemblies. A voluntary subscription is like a tax upon a luxury, and does not necessarily raise the price of labour.

It should be recollected also, that in a voluntary association of a small extent, over which each individual member can exercise a superintendence, it is highly probable that the original agreements will all be strictly fulfilled, or, if they be not, every man may at least have the redress of withdrawing himself from the club. But in an universal compulsory subscription, which must necessarily become a national concern, there would be no security whatever for the fulfilment of the original agreements; and when the funds failed, which they certainly would do, when all the idle and dissolute were

were included, instead of some of the most industrious and provident, as at present, a larger subscription would probably be demanded, and no man would have the right to refuse it. The evil would thus go on increasing as the poor-rates do now. If indeed the assistance given were always specific, and on no account to be increased, as in the present voluntary associations, this would certainly be a striking advantage; but the same advantage might be completely attained by a similar distribution of the sums collected by the parish rates. On the whole therefore, it appears to me that, if the friendly societies were made universal and compulsory, it would be merely a different mode of collecting parish rates; and any particular mode of distribution might be as well adopted upon one system as upon the other.

With regard to the proposal of making single men pay a fourth part of their earnings weekly, and married men with families only a thirtieth part, it would evidently operate as a heavy fine upon bachelors, and a high bounty upon children; and is therefore

therefore directly adverse to the general spirit, in which Mr. Townsend's excellent dissertation is written. Before he introduces this proposal, he lays it down as a general principle, that no system for the relief of the poor can be good, which does not regulate population by the demand for labour[a]; but this proposal clearly tends to encourage population without any reference to the demand for labour, and punishes a young man for his prudence in refraining from marriage, at a time, perhaps, when this demand may be so small, that the wages of labour are totally inadequate to the support of a family. I should be averse to any compulsory system whatever for the poor; but certainly if single men were compelled to pay a contribution for the future contingencies of the married state, they ought in justice to receive a benefit proportioned to the period of their privation; and the man who had contributed a fourth of his earnings for merely one year, ought not to be put upon a level

[a] P. 84.

with

with him who had contributed this proportion for ten years.

Mr. Arthur Young, in most of his works, appears clearly to understand the principle of population, and is fully aware of the evils, which must necessarily result from an increase of people beyond the demand for labour and the means of comfortable subsistence. In his Tour through France he has particularly laboured on this point, and shewn most forcibly the misery, which results in that country from the excess of population occasioned by the too great divison of property. Such an increase he justly calls merely a multiplication of wretchedness. "Couples marry and procreate on the idea, not the reality, of a maintenance; they increase beyond the demand of towns and manufactures; and the consequence is, distress, and numbers dying of diseases arising from insufficient nourishment*."

In another place he quotes a very sensible passage from the report of the committee of

* Travels in France, vol. i. c. xii. p. 408.

mendicity,

mendicity, which, alluding to the evils of over-population, concludes thus, " Il faudroit enfin nécessairement que le prix de " travail baissât par la plus grande concurrence de travailleurs, d'où résulteroit " un indigence complette pour ceux qui " ne trouveroient pas de travail, et une " subsistence incomplette pour ceux mêmes " auxquels il ne seroit pas refusé." And in remarking upon this passage, he observes, " France itself affords an irrefragable proof of the truth of these sentiments; for I am clearly of opinion, from " the observations I made in every province of the kingdom, that her population is so much beyond the proportion " of her industry and labour, that she would " be much more powerful and infinitely " more flourishing, if she had five or six " millions less of inhabitants. From her " too great population she presents in every " quarter such spectacles of wretchedness, " as are absolutely inconsistent with that " degree of national felicity, which she was " capable of attaining, even under the old " government. A traveller much less attentive

" tentive than I was to objects of this kind " must see at every turn most unequivocal " signs of distress. That these should exist, " no one can wonder, who considers the " price of labour and of provisions, and " the misery into which a small rise in the " price of wheat throws the lower classes*."

" If you would see," he says, " a dis- " trict with as little distress in it as is con- " sistent with the political system of the " old government of France, you must as- " suredly go where there are no little pro- " prietors at all. You must visit the great " farms in Beauce, Picardy, part of Nor- " mandy and Artois, and there you will " find no more population than what is " regularly employed and regularly paid; " and if in such districts you should, con- " trary to this rule, meet with much dis- " tress, it is twenty to one but that it is in " a parish, which has some commons which " tempt the poor to have cattle—to have " property—and in consequence misery. " When you are engaged in this political " tour, finish it by seeing England, and

* Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 469.

" I will

" I will shew you a set of peasants well " clothed, well nourished, tolerably drunken " from superfluity, well lodged and at their " ease; and yet amongst them, not one in a " thousand has either land or cattle[a]." A little further on, alluding to encouragements to marriage, he says of France. " The predo- " minant evil of the kingdom is the having " so great a population, that she can neither " employ nor feed it; why then encourage " marriage? Would you breed more peo- " ple, because you have more already than " you know what to do with? You have " so great a competition for food, that your " people are starving or in misery; and " you would encourage the production of " more, to increase that competition. It " may almost be questioned, whether the " contrary policy ought not to be em- " braced; whether difficulties should not " be laid on the marriage of those, who " cannot make it appear that they have " the prospect of maintaining the children " that shall be the fruit of it? But why " encourage marriages, which are sure to

[a] Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 471.

" take

" take place in all situations in which they
" ought to take place? There is no in-
" stance to be found of plenty of regular
" employment being first established, where
" marriages have not followed in a propor-
" tionate degree. The policy therefore, at
" best, is useless, and may be pernicious."

After having once so clearly understood the principle of population, as to express these and many other sentiments on the subject, equally just and important, it is not a little surprising to find Mr. Young, in a pamphlet, entitled, *The Question of Scarcity plainly stated, and Remedies considered, (published in* 1800,) observing, that " the
" means, which would of all others perhaps
" tend most surely to prevent future scar-
" cities so oppressive to the poor as the pre-
" sent, would be to secure to every country
" labourer in the kingdom, that has three
" children and upwards, half an acre of
" land for potatoes; and grass enough to
" feed one or two cows *. * * * * If each
" had his ample potatoe-ground and a cow,
" the price of wheat would be of little more

* P. 77.

" consequence

" consequence to them than it is to their " brethren in Ireland."

" Every one admits the system to be " good, but the question is how to en- " force it."

I was by no means aware that the excellence of the system had been so generally admitted. For myself I strongly protest against being included in the general term of *every one*, as I should consider the adoption of this system as the most cruel and fatal blow to the happiness of the lower classes of people in this country that they had ever received.

Mr. Young however goes on to say, that " The magnitude of the object should make " us disregard any difficulties, but such as " are insuperable: none such would pro- " bably occur, if something like the follow- " ing means were resorted to.

" I. Where there are common pastures, " to give to a labouring man having " children, a right to demand an allotment " proportioned to the family, to be set out " by the parish officers, &c., *** and a " cow bought. Such labourer to have both

" for

" for life, paying 40*s.* a year till the price of " the cow, &c., was reimbursed: at his " death to go to the labourer having the " most numerous family, for life, paying " shillings a week to the widow of his " predecessor.

" II. Labourers thus demanding allot- " ments by reason of their families to have " land assigned and cows bought, till the " proportion so allotted amounts to one " of the extent of the common.

" III. In parishes where there are no " commons, and the quality of the land " adequate, every cottager having " children, to whose cottage there is not " within a given time land sufficient for a " cow, and half an acre of potatoes, as- " signed at a fair average rent, subject to " appeal to the sessions, to have a right to " demand shillings per week of the pa- " rish for every child, till such land be as- " signed; leaving to landlords and tenants " the means of doing it. Cows to be found " by the parish under an annual reimburse- " ment[a]."

[a] P. 78.

" The

"The great object is, by means of milk "and potatoes, to take the mass of the "country poor from the consumption of "wheat, and to give them substitutes "equally wholesome and nourishing, and "as independent of scarcities, natural and "artificial, as the providence of the Al-"mighty will admit[a]."

Would not this plan operate, in the most direct manner, as an encouragement to marriage and a bounty on children, which Mr. Young has with so much justice reprobated in his travels in France? and does he seriously think that it would be an eligible thing to feed the mass of the people in this country on milk and potatoes, and make them as independent of the price of corn and demand for labour as their brethren in Ireland?

The specific cause of the poverty and misery of the lower classes of people in France and Ireland is, that from the extreme subdivision of property in the one country, and the facility of obtaining a cabin and potatoes in the other, a population is brought

[a] P. 79.

into existence, which is not demanded by the quantity of capital and employment in the country; and the consequence of which must therefore necessarily be, as is very justly expressed in the Report of the Committee of Mendicity before mentioned, to lower in general the price of labour by too great competition; from which must result complete indigence to those who cannot find employment, and an incomplete subsistence even to those who can.

The obvious tendency of Mr. Young's plan is, by encouraging marriage and furnishing a cheap food, independent of the price of corn, and of course of the demand for labour, to place the lower classes of people exactly in this situation.

It may perhaps be said, that our poor-laws at present regularly encourage marriage and children, by distributing relief in proportion to the size of families; and that this plan, which is proposed as a substitute, would merely do the same thing in a less objectionable manner. But surely, in endeavouring to get rid of the evil of the poor-laws, we ought not to retain their most pernicious

nicious quality; and Mr. Young must know as well as I do, that the principal reason why poor-laws have invariably been found ineffectual in the relief of the poor is, that they tend to encourage a population, which is not regulated by the demand for labour. Mr. Young himself, indeed, expressly takes notice of this effect in England, and observes that, notwithstanding the unrivalled prosperity of her manufactures, "population is sometimes too active, as we see "clearly by the dangerous increase of "poor's rates in country villages[a]."

But the fact is, that Mr. Young's plan would be incomparably more powerful in encouraging a population beyond the demand for labour, than our present poor-laws. A laudable repugnance to the receiving of parish relief, arising partly from a spirit of independence not yet extinct, and partly from the disagreeable mode in which the relief is given, undoubtedly deters many from marrying with a certainty of falling on the parish; and the proportion of births and marriages to the whole popula-

[a] Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 470.

tion, which has before been noticed, clearly proves that the poor-laws do not encourage marriage so much as might be expected from theory. But the case would be very different, if, when a labourer had an early marriage in contemplation, the terrific forms of workhouses and parish officers, which might disturb his resolution, were to be exchanged for the fascinating visions of land and cows. If the love of property, as Mr. Young has repeatedly said, will make a man do much, it would be rather strange if it would not make him marry; an action to which, it appears from experience, that he is by no means disinclined.

The population, which would be thus called into being, would be supported by the extended cultivation of potatoes, and would of course go on without any reference to the demand for labour. In the present state of things, notwithstanding the flourishing condition of our manufactures and the numerous checks to our population, there is no practical problem so difficult, as to find employment for the poor; but this difficulty would evidently be aggravated a hundred

hundred fold, under the circumstances here supposed.

In Ireland, or in any other country, where the common food is potatoes, and every man who wishes to marry may obtain a piece of ground sufficient, when planted with this root, to support a family, prizes may be given till the treasury is exhausted for essays on the best means of employing the poor; but till some stop to the progress of population naturally arising from this state of things takes place, the object in view is really a physical impossibility *.

Mr. Young has intimated, that, if the people were fed upon milk and potatoes, they would be more independent of scarcities than at present; but why this should

* Dr. Crumpe's Prize Essay on the best means of finding employment for the people is an excellent treatise, and contains most valuable information; but till the capital of the country is better proportioned to its population, it is perfectly chimerical to expect success in any project of the kind. I am also strongly disposed to believe that the indolent and turbulent habits of the lower Irish can never be corrected, while the potatoe system enables them to increase so much beyond the regular demand for labour.

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be the case I really cannot comprehend. Undoubtedly people who live upon potatoes will not be much affected by a scarcity of wheat; but is there any contradiction in the supposition of a failure in the crops of potatoes? I believe it is generally understood that they are more liable to suffer damage during the winter than grain. From the much greater quantity of food yielded by a given piece of land when planted with potatoes, than under any other kind of cultivation, it would naturally happen that, for some time after the introduction of this root as the general food of the lower classes of people, a greater quantity would be grown than was demanded, and they would live in plenty. Mr. Young, in his Travels through France, observes, that, "In dis-
"tricts which contain immense quantities
"of waste land of a certain degree of fer-
"tility, as in the roots of the Pyrenees,
"belonging to communities ready to sell
"them, economy and industry, animated
"with the views of settling and marrying,
"flourish greatly; in such neighbourhoods
"something like an American increase
"takes

"takes place, and if the land be cheap "little distress is found. But as procrea- "tion goes on rapidly under such circum- "stances, the least check to subsistence "is attended with great misery; as wastes "becoming dearer, or the best portions "being sold, or difficulties arising in the "acquisition; all which circumstances I "met with in those mountains. The mo- "ment that any impediment happens, the "distress of such a people will be propor- "tioned to the activity and vigour, which "had animated population[a]."

This description will apply exactly to what would take place in this country, on the distribution of small portions of land to the common people, and the introduction of potatoes as their general food. For a time the change might appear beneficial; and of course the idea of property would make it, at first, highly acceptable to the poor; but as Mr. Young in another place says, "You presently arrive at the limit, "beyond which the earth, cultivate it as "you please, will feed no more mouths;

[a] Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 409.

"yet

" yet those simple manners, which instigate
" to marriage, still continue; what then is
" the consequence, but the most dreadful
" misery imaginable?[a]."

When the commons were all divided, and difficulties began to occur in procuring potatoe-grounds, the habit of early marriages, which had been introduced, would occasion the most complicated distress; and when from the increasing population, and diminishing sources of subsistence, the average growth of potatoes was not more than the average consumption, a scarcity of potatoes would be, in every respect, as probable as a scarcity of wheat at present; and, when it did arrive, it would be beyond all comparison more dreadful.

When the common people of a country live principally upon the dearest grain, as they do in England on wheat, they have great resources in a scarcity; and barley, oats, rice, cheap soups and potatoes, all present themselves as less expensive, yet at the same time wholesome means of nourishment; but when their habitual food is the

[a] Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 409.

lowest

lowest in this scale, they appear to be absolutely without resource, except in the bark of trees, like the poor Swedes; and a great portion of them must necessarily be starved.

The wages of labour will always be regulated by the proportion of the supply to the demand. And as, upon the potatoe system, a supply more than adequate to the demand would very soon take place, and this supply might be continued at a very cheap rate, on account of the cheapness of the food which would furnish it, the common price of labour would soon be regulated principally by the price of potatoes instead of the price of wheat, as at present; and the rags and wretched cabins of Ireland would follow of course.

When the demand for labour occasionally exceeds the supply, and wages are regulated by the price of the dearest grain, they will generally be such as to yield something besides mere food, and the common people may be able to obtain decent houses and decent clothing. If the contrast between the state of the French and English

English labourers, which Mr. Young has drawn, be in any degree near the truth, the advantage on the side of England has been occasioned precisely and exclusively by these two circumstances; and if, by the adoption of milk and potatoes as the general food of the common people, these circumstances were totally altered, so as to make the supply of labour constantly in a great excess above the demand for it, and regulate wages by the price of the cheapest food, the advantage would be immediately lost, and no efforts of benevolence could prevent the most general and abject poverty.

Upon the same principle it would by no means be eligible that the cheap soups of Count Rumford should be adopted as the general food of the common people. They are excellent inventions for public institutions, and as occasional resources; but if they were once universally adopted by the poor, it would be impossible to prevent the price of labour from being regulated by them; and the labourer, though at first he might have more to spare for other expenses, besides food,

food, would ultimately have much less to spare than before.

The desirable thing, with a view to the happiness of the common people, seems to be, that their habitual food should be dear, and their wages regulated by it; but that, in a scarcity, or other occasional distress, the cheaper food should be readily and cheerfully adopted [a]. With a view of rendering this transition easier, and at the same time of making an useful distinction between those who are dependent on parish relief and those who are not, I should think that one plan, which Mr. Young proposes, would be extremely eligible. This is "to "pass an act prohibiting relief, so far as "subsistence is concerned, in any other "manner than by potatoes, rice and soup; "not merely as a measure of the moment,

[a] It is certainly to be wished that every cottage in England should have a garden to it well stocked with vegetables. A little variety of food is in every point of view highly useful. Potatoes are undoubtedly a most valuable assistance, though I should be very sorry ever to see them the principal dependence of our labourers.

"but

"but permanently[a]." I do not think that this plan would necessarily introduce these articles as the common food of the lower classes; and if it merely made the transition to them in periods of distress easier, and at the same time drew a more marked line than at present between dependence and independence, it would have a very beneficial effect.

As it is acknowledged that the introduction of milk and potatoes, or of cheap soups, as the general food of the lower classes of people, would lower the price of labour, perhaps some cold politician might propose to adopt the system, with a view of underselling foreigners in the markets of Europe. I should not envy the feelings which could suggest such a proposal. I really cannot conceive any thing much more detestable than the idea of knowingly condemning the labourers of this country

[a] Question of Scarcity, &c. p. 80. This might be done, at least with regard to workhouses. In assisting the poor at their own homes, it might be subject to some practical difficulties.

to

to the rags and wretched cabins of Ireland, for the purpose of selling a few more broad cloths and calicoes[a]. The wealth and power

[a] In this observation I have not the least idea of alluding to Mr. Young, who, I firmly believe, ardently wishes to improve the condition of the lower classes of people; though I do not think that his plan would effect the object in view. He either did not see those consequences which I apprehend from it; or he has a better opinion of the happiness of the common people in Ireland than I have. In his Irish tour he seemed much struck with the plenty of potatoes which they possessed, and the absence of all apprehension of want. Had he travelled in 1800 and 1801, his impressions would by all accounts have been very different. From the facility which has hitherto prevailed in Ireland of procuring potatoe-grounds, scarcities have certainly been rare, and all the effects of the system have not yet been felt, though certainly enough to make it appear very far from desirable.

Mr. Young has since pursued his idea more in detail, in a pamphlet entitled, *An Inquiry into the Propriety of applying Wastes to the better Maintenance and Support of the Poor.* But the impression on my mind is still the same; and it appears to be calculated to assimilate the condition of the labourers of this country to that of the lower classes of the Irish. Mr. Young seems, in a most unaccountable manner, to have forgotten all his general principles on this subject. He has treated the question of a provision for the poor, as if it was merely, How to provide

power of nations are, after all, only desirable as they contribute to happiness. In this point of view, I should be very far from undervaluing them, considering them, in general, as absolutely necessary means to attain the end; but if any particular case should occur, where they appear to be in direct opposition to each other, we cannot rationally doubt which ought to be preferred.

Fortunately, however, even on the narrowest political principles, the adoption of such a system would not answer. It has always been observed that those, who work chiefly on their own property, work very in-

provide in the cheapest and best manner for a *given number* of people. If this had been the sole question, it would never have taken so many hundred years to resolve. But the real question is, How to provide for those who are in want, in such a manner as to prevent a continual accumulation of their numbers? and it will readily occur to the reader, that a plan of giving them land and cows cannot promise much success in this respect. If, after all the commons had been divided, the poor-laws were still to continue in force, no good reason can be assigned why the rates should not in a few years be as high as they are at present, independently of all that had been expended in the purchase of land and stock.

dolently

dolently and unwillingly when employed for others; and it must necessarily happen, when, from the general adoption of a very cheap food, the population of a country increases considerably beyond the demand for labour, that habits of idleness and turbulence will be generated, most peculiarly unfavourable to a flourishing state of manufactures. In spite of the cheapness of labour in Ireland, there are few manufactures which can be prepared in that country for foreign sale so cheap as in England: and this is in a great measure owing to the want of those industrious habits which can only be produced by regular employment.

CHAP.

CHAP. XII*.

Continuation of the same Subject.

THE increasing portion of the society which has of late years become either wholly or partially dependent upon parish assistance, together with the increasing burden of the poor's rates on the landed property, has for some time been working a gradual change in the public opinion respecting the benefits resulting to the labouring classes of society, and to society in general, from a legal provision for the poor. But the distress which has followed the peace of 1814, and the great and sudden pressure which it has occasioned on the parish rates, have accelerated this change in a very marked manner. More just and enlightened views on the subject are daily gaining ground; the difficulties attending a legal provision for the poor are better un-

* Written in 1817.

derstood,

derstood, and more generally acknowledged; and opinions are now seen in print, and heard in conversation, which twenty years ago would almost have been considered as treason to the interests of the state.

This change of public opinion, stimulated by the severe pressure of the moment, has directed an unusual portion of attention to the subject of the poor-laws; and as it is acknowledged that the present system has essentially failed, various plans have been proposed either as substitutes or improvements. It may be useful to inquire shortly how far the plans which have already been published are calculated to accomplish the ends which they propose. It is generally thought that some measure of importance will be the result of the present state of public opinion. To the permanent success of any such measure, it is absolutely necessary that it should apply itself in some degree to the real source of the difficulty. Yet there is reason to fear, that notwithstanding the present improved

knowledge on the subject, this point may be too much overlooked.

Among the plans which appear to have excited a considerable degree of the public attention, is one of Mr. Owen. I have already adverted to some views of Mr. Owen in a chapter on Systems of Equality, and spoken of his experience with the respect which is justly due to it. If the question were merely how to accommodate, support and train, in the best manner, societies of 1200 people, there are perhaps few persons more entitled to attention than Mr. Owen: but in the plan which he has proposed, he seems totally to have overlooked the nature of the problem to be solved. This problem is, *How to provide for those who are in want, in such a manner as to prevent a continual increase of their numbers, and of the proportion which they bear to the whole society.* And it must be allowed that Mr. Owen's plan not only does not make the slightest approach towards accomplishing this object, but seems to be peculiarly calculated to effect an object exactly the reverse of it, that

that is, to increase and multiply the number of paupers.

If the establishments which he recommends could really be conducted according to his apparent intentions, the order of nature and the lessons of providence would indeed be in the most marked manner reversed; and the idle and profligate would be placed in a situation which might justly be the envy of the industrious and virtuous. The labourer or manufacturer who is now ill lodged and ill clothed, and obliged to work twelve hours a day to maintain his family, could have no motive to continue his exertions, if the reward for slackening them, and seeking parish assistance, was good lodging, good clothing, the maintenance and education of all his children, and the exchange of twelve hours hard work in an unwholesome manufactory for four or five hours of easy agricultural labour on a pleasant farm. Under these temptations, the numbers yearly falling into the new establishments from the labouring and manufacturing classes, together with the rapid increase by procreation of the societies

 themselves,

themselves, would very soon render the first purchases of land utterly incompetent to their support. More land must then be purchased, and fresh settlements made; and if the higher classes of society were bound to proceed in the system according to its apparent spirit and intention, there cannot be a doubt that the whole nation would shortly become a nation of paupers with a community of goods.

Such a result might not perhaps be alarming to Mr. Owen. It is just possible indeed that he may have had this result in contemplation when he proposed his plan, and have thought that it was the best mode of quietly introducing that community of goods which he believes is necessary to complete the virtue and happiness of society. But to those who totally dissent from him as to the effects to be expected from a community of goods; to those who are convinced that even his favourite doctrine, that a man can be trained to produce more than he consumes, which is no doubt true at present, may easily cease to be true, when cultivation is pushed beyond the bounds prescribed to it by private property;[a]

perty;[a] the approaches towards a system of this kind will be considered as approaches towards a system of universal indolence, poverty and wretchedness.

Upon the supposition then, that Mr. Owen's plan could be effectively executed, and that the various pauper societies scattered over the country could at first be made to realize his most sanguine wishes, such might be expected to be their termination in a moderately short time, from the natural and necessary action of the principle of population.

But it is probable that the other grand objection to all systems of common property would even at the very outset confound the experience of Mr. Owen, and destroy the happiness to which he looks forward. In the society at the Lanerk Mills, two powerful stimulants to industry and good conduct are in action, which would be totally wanting in the societies proposed. At Lanerk, the whole of every man's earnings is his own; and his power of maintaining himself, his wife and children, in decency and comfort, will be in

[a] See vol. II. c. x. b. iii. p. 431.

exact

exact proportion to his industry, sobriety and economy. At Lanerk, also, if any workman be perseveringly indolent and negligent, if he get drunk and spoil his work, or if in any way he conduct himself essentially ill, he not only naturally suffers by the diminution of his earnings, but may at any time be turned off, and the society be relieved from the influence and example of a profligate and dangerous member. On the other hand, in the pauper establishments proposed in the present plan, the industry, sobriety and good conduct of each individual, would be very feebly indeed connected with his power of maintaining himself and family comfortably; and in the case of persevering idleness and misconduct, instead of the simple and effective remedy of dismission, recourse must be had to a system of direct punishment of some kind or other, determined, and enforced by authority, which is always painful and distressing, and generally inefficient.

I confess it appears to me that the most successful experience, in such an establishment

ment as that of Lanerk, furnishes no ground whatever to say what could be done towards the improvement of society in an establishment where the produce of all the labour employed would go to a common stock, and dismissal from the very nature and object of the institution, would be impossible. If under such disadvantages the proper management of these establishments were within the limits of possibility, what judgment, what firmness, what patience, would be required for the purpose! But where are such qualities to be found in sufficient abundance to manage one or two millions of people?

On the whole then it may be concluded, that Mr. Owen's plan would have to encounter obstacles that really appear to be insuperable, even at its first outset; and that if these could by any possible means be overcome, and the most complete success attained, the system would, without some most unnatural and unjust laws to prevent the progress of population, lead to a state of universal poverty and distress, in which, though all the rich might be made poor, none of the poor could be made rich,—not

even

even so rich as a common labourer at present.

The plan for bettering the condition of the labouring classes of the community, published by Mr. Curwen, is professedly a slight sketch; but principles, not details, are what it is our present object to consider; and the principles on which he would proceed are declared with sufficient distinctness, when he states the great objects of his design to be,

1. Meliorating the present wretched condition of the lower orders of the people.

2. Equalizing by a new tax the present poor's rates, which *must* be raised for their relief.

3. And giving to all those, who may think proper to place themselves under its protection, a voice in the local management and distribution of the fund destined for their support.

The first proposition is, of course, or ought to be, the object of every plan proposed. And the two last may be considered as the modes by which it is intended to accomplish it.

But

But it is obvious that these two propositions, though they may be both desirable on other accounts, not only do not really touch, but do not even propose to touch, the great problem. We wish to check the increase and diminish the proportion of paupers, in order to give greater wealth, happiness and independence to the mass of the labouring classes. But the equalization of the poor's rates, simply considered, would have a very strong tendency to increase rather than to diminish the number of the dependent poor. At present the parochial rates fall so very heavily upon one particular species of property, that the persons, whose business it is to allow them, have in general a very strong interest indeed to keep them low; but if they fell equally on all sorts of property, and particularly if they were collected from large districts, or from counties, the local distributors would have comparatively but very feeble motives to reduce them, and they might be expected to increase with great rapidity.

It may be readily allowed, however, that the

the peculiar weight with which the poor's rates press upon land is essentially unfair. It is particularly hard upon some country parishes, where the births greatly exceed the deaths, owing to the constant emigrations which are taking place to towns and manufactories, that, under any circumstances, a great portion of these emigrants should be returned upon them, when old, disabled, or out of work. Such parishes may be totally without the power of furnishing either work or support for all the persons born within their precincts. In fact, the same number would not have been born in them, unless these emigrations had taken place. And it is certainly hard therefore that parishes so circumstanced should be obliged to receive and maintain all who may return to them in distress. Yet, in the present state of the country, the most pressing evil is not the weight upon the land, but the increasing proportion of paupers. And, as the equalization of the rates would certainly have a tendency to increase this proportion, I should be sorry to see such a measure introduced, even if it

it were easily practicable, unless acccompanied by some very strong and decisive limitations to the continued increase of the rates so equalized.

The other proposition of Mr. Curwen will, in like manner, be found to afford no security against the increase of pauperism. We know perfectly well that the funds of the friendly societies, as they are at present constituted, though managed by the contributors themselves, are seldom distributed with the economy necessary to their permanent efficiency; and in the national societies proposed, as a considerable part of the fund would be derived from the poor's rates, there is certainly reason to expect that every question which could be influenced by the contributors would be determined on principles still more indulgent and less economical.

On this account it may well be doubted, whether it would ever be advisable to mix any public money, derived from assessments, with the subscriptions of the labouring classes. The probable result would be, that in the case of any failure in the funds

funds of such societies, arising from erroneous calculations and too liberal allowances, it would be expected that the whole of the deficiency should be made up by the assessments. And any rules which might have been made to limit the amount applied in this way would probably be but a feeble barrier against claims founded on a plan brought forward by the higher classes of society.

Another strong objection to this sort of union of parochial and private contributions is, that from the first the members of such societies could not justly feel themselves independent. If one half or one third of the fund were to be subscribed from the parish, they would stand upon a very different footing from the members of the present benefit-clubs. While so considerable a part of the allowances to which they might be entitled in sickness or in age would really come from the poor's rates, they would be apt to consider the plan as what, in many respects, it really would be,—only a different mode of raising the rates. If the system were to become general,

neral, the contributions of the labouring classes would have nearly the effects of a tax on labour, and such a tax has been generally considered as more unfavourable to industry and production than most other taxes.

The best part of Mr. Curwen's plan is that which proposes to give a credit to each contributor in proportion to the amount of his contributions, and to make his allowance in sickness, and his annuity in old age, dependent upon this amount; but this object could easily be accomplished without the objectionable accompaniments. It is also very properly observed, that "want of employment must furnish no "claims on the society; for, if this excuse "were to be admitted, it would most proba-"bly be attended with the most pernicious. "consequences." Yet it is at the same time rather rashly intimated, that employment must be found for all who are able to work; and, in another place, it is observed, that timely assistance would be afforded by these societies, without degradation, on all temporary occasions of suspended labour.

On

On the whole, when it is considered that a large and probably increasing amount of poor's rates would be subscribed to these societies; that on this account their members could hardly be considered as independent of parish assistance; and that the usual poor's rates would still remain to be applied as they are now, without any proposed limitations, there is little hope that Mr. Curwen's plan would be successful in diminishing the whole amount of the rates and the proportion of dependent poor.

There are two errors respecting the management of the poor, into which the public seem inclined to fall at the present moment. The first is a disposition to attach too much importance to the effects of subscriptions from the poor themselves, without sufficient attention to the mode in which they are distributed. But the mode of distribution is much the more important point of the two; and if this be radically bad, it is of little consequence in what manner the subscriptions are raised, whether from the poor themselves or from any other quarter. If the labouring classes were universally to contribute

contribute what might at first appear a very ample proportion of their earnings, for their own support in sickness and in old age, when out of work, and when the family consisted of more than two children; it is quite certain that the funds would become deficient. Such a mode of distribution implies a power of supporting a rapidly increasing and unlimited population on a limited territory, and must therefore terminate in aggravated poverty. Our present friendly societies or benefit-clubs aim at only limited objects, which are susceptible of calculation; yet many have failed, and many more it is understood are likely to fail from the insufficiency of their funds. If any society were to attempt to give much more extensive assistance to its members; if it were to endeavour to imitate what is partially effected by the poor-laws, or to accomplish those objects which Condorcet thought were within the power of proper calculations; the failure of its funds, however large at first, and from whatever sources derived, would be absolutely inevitable. In short, it cannot be too often or too strongly impressed

impressed upon the public, especially when any question for the improvement of the condition of the poor is in agitation, that no application of knowledge and ingenuity to this subject, no efforts either of the poor or of the rich, or both, in the form of contributions, or in any other way, can possibly place the labouring classes of society in such a state as to enable them to marry generally at the same age in an old and fully-peopled country as they may do with perfect safety and advantage in a new one.

The other error towards which the public seems to incline at present is that of laying too much stress upon the *employment* of the poor. It seems to be thought that one of the principal causes of the failure of our present system is the not having properly executed that part of the 43d of Elizabeth which enjoins the purchase of materials to set the poor to work. It is certainly desirable, on many accounts, to employ the poor when it is practicable, though it will always be extremely difficult to make people work actively who are without the usual and most natural motives to such exertions;

and

and a system of coercion involves the necessity of placing great power in the hands of persons very likely to abuse it. Still however it is probable that the poor might be employed more than they have hitherto been, in a way to be advantageous to their habits and morals, without being prejudicial in other respects. But we should fall into the grossest error if we were to imagine that any essential part of the evils of the poor-laws, or of the difficulties under which we are at present labouring, has arisen from not employing the poor; or if we were to suppose that any possible scheme for giving work to all who are out of employment can ever in any degree apply to the source of these evils and difficulties, so as to prevent their recurrence. In no conceivable case can the forced employment of the poor, though managed in the most judicious manner, have any direct tendency to proportion more accurately the supply of labour to the natural demand for it. And without great care and caution it is obvious that it may have a pernicious effect of an opposite kind. When, for instance, from

deficient demand or deficient capital, labour has a strong tendency to fall, if we keep it up to its usual price by creating an artificial demand by public subscriptions or advances from the government, we evidently prevent the population of the country from adjusting itself gradually to its diminished resources, and act much in the same manner as those, who would prevent the price of corn from rising in a scarcity, which must necessarily terminate in increased distress.

Without then meaning to object to all plans for employing the poor, some of which, at certain times and with proper restrictions, may be useful as temporary measures, it is of great importance, in order to prevent ineffectual efforts and continued disappointments, to be fully aware that the permanent remedy which we are seeking cannot possibly come from this quarter.

It may indeed be affirmed with the most perfect confidence that there is only one class of causes from which any approaches towards a remedy can be rationally expected; and that consists of whatever

has

has a tendency to increase the prudence and foresight of the labouring classes. This is the touchstone to which every plan proposed for the improvement of the condition of the poor should be applied. If the plan be such as to co-operate with the lessons of Nature and Providence, and to encourage and promote habits of prudence and foresight, essential and permanent benefit may be expected from it: if it has no tendency of this kind, it may possibly still be good as a temporary measure, and on other accounts, but we may be quite certain that it does not apply to the source of the specific evil for which we are seeking a remedy.

Of all the plans which have yet been proposed for the assistance of the labouring classes, the saving-banks, as far as they go, appear to me much the best, and the most likely, if they should become general, to effect a permanent improvement in the condition of the lower classes of society. By giving to each individual the full and entire benefit of his own industry and prudence, they are calculated greatly to strengthen the lessons of Nature and Providence; and a

young man, who had been saving from fourteen or fifteen with a view to marriage at four or five and twenty, or perhaps much earlier, would probably be induced to wait two or three years longer if the times were unfavourable; if corn were high; if wages were low; or if the sum he had saved had been found by experience not to be sufficient to furnish a tolerable security against want. A habit of saving a portion of present earnings for future contingencies can scarcely be supposed to exist without general habits of prudence and foresight; and if the opportunity furnished by provident banks to individuals, of reaping the full benefit of saving, should render the practice general, it might rationally be expected that, under the varying resources of the country, the population would be adjusted to the actual demand for labour, at the expense of less pain and less poverty; and the remedy thus appears, so far as it goes, to apply to the very root of the evil.

The great object of saving-banks, however, is to prevent want and dependence by enabling the poor to provide against contingencies

contingencies themselves. And in a natural state of society, such institutions, with the aid of private charity well directed, would probably be all the means necessary to produce the best practicable effects. In the present state of things in this country the case is essentially different. With so very large a body of poor habitually dependent upon public funds, the institutions of saving-banks cannot be considered in the light of substitutes for the poor's rates. The problem how to support those who are in want in such a manner as not continually to increase the proportion which they bear to the whole society will still remain to be solved. But if any plan should be adopted either of gradually abolishing or gradually reducing and fixing the amount of the poor's rates, saving-banks would essentially assist it; at the same time that they would receive a most powerful aid in return.

In the actual state of things, they have been established at a period likely to be particularly unfavourable to them—a period of very general distress, and of the most

most extensive parochial assistance; and the success which has attended them, even under these disadvantages, seems clearly to shew, that in a period of prosperity and good wages, combined with a prospect of diminished parochial assistance, they might spread very extensively, and have a considerable effect on the general habits of the people.

With a view to give them greater encouragement at the present moment, an act has been passed allowing persons to receive parish assistance at the discretion of the justices, although they may have funds of their own under a certain amount in a saving-bank. But this is probably a short-sighted policy. It is sacrificing the principle for which saving-banks are established, to obtain an advantage which, on this very account, will be comparatively of little value. We wish to teach the labouring classes to rely more upon their own exertions and resources, as the only way of really improving their condition; yet we reward their saving by making them still dependent upon that very species

of

of assistance which it is our object that they should avoid. The progress of saving-banks under such a regulation will be but an equivocal and uncertain symptom of good; whereas without such a regulation every step would tell, every fresh deposition would prove, the growth of a desire to become independent of parish assistance; and both the great extension of the friendly societies, and the success of the saving-banks in proportion to the time they have been established, clearly shew that much progress might be expected in these institutions under favourable circumstances, without resorting to a measure which is evidently calculated to sacrifice the end to the means.

With regard to the plans which have been talked of for reducing and limiting the poor's rates, they are certainly of a kind to apply to the root of the evil; but they would be obviously unjust without a formal retraction of the *right* of the poor to support; and for many years they would unquestionably be much more harsh in their operation than the plan of abolition which I have ventured to propose in a preceding chapter.

chapter. At the same time, if it be thought that this country cannot entirely get rid of a system which has been so long interwoven in its frame, a limitation of the amount of the poor's rates, or rather of their proportion to the wealth and population of the country which would be more rational and just, accompanied with a very full and fair notice of the nature of the change to be made, might be productive of essential benefit, and do much towards improving the habits and happiness of the poor.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

Of the Necessity of general Principles on this Subject.

IT has been observed by Hume, that of all sciences there is none where first appearances are more deceitful than in politics *. The remark is undoubtedly very just, and is most peculiarly applicable to that department of the science, which relates to the modes of improving the condition of the lower classes of society.

We are continually hearing declamations against theory and theorists, by men who pride themselves upon the distinction of being practical. It must be acknowledged that bad theories are very bad things, and the authors of them useless and sometimes pernicious members of society. But these advocates of practice do not seem to be aware that they themselves very often come under this description, and that a great

* Essay xi. vol. i. p. 431. 8vo.

part

part of them may be classed among the most mischievous theorists of their time. When a man faithfully relates any facts, which have come within the scope of his own observation, however confined it may have been, he undoubtedly adds to the sum of general knowledge, and confers a benefit on society. But when from this confined experience, from the management of his own little farm, or the details of the workhouse in his neighbourhood, he draws a general inference, as is frequently the case, he then at once erects himself into a theorist; and is the more dangerous, because, experience being the only just foundation for theory, people are often caught merely by the sound of the word, and do not stop to make the distinction between that partial experience which, on such subjects, is no foundation whatever for a just theory, and that general experience, on which alone a just theory can be founded.

There are perhaps few subjects on which human ingenuity has been more exerted than the endeavour to meliorate the condition

dition of the poor; and there is certainly no subject in which it has so completely failed. The question between the theorist who calls himself practical, and the genuine theorist, is, whether this should prompt us to look into all the holes and corners of workhouses, and content ourselves with mulcting the parish officers for their waste of cheese-parings and candle-ends, and with distributing more soups and potatoes; or to recur to general principles, which shew us at once the cause of the failure, and prove that the system has been from the beginning radically erroneous. There is no subject to which general principles have been so seldom applied; and yet, in the whole compass of human knowledge, I doubt if there be one in which it is so dangerous to lose sight of them; because the partial and immediate effects of a particular mode of giving assistance are so often directly opposite to the general and permanent effects.

It has been observed in particular districts, where cottagers are possessed of small pieces of land, and are in the habit of keeping cows, that during the late scarcities

cities some of them were able to support themselves without parish assistance, and others with comparatively little[a].

According to the partial view in which this subject has been always contemplated, a general inference has been drawn from such instances, that, if we could place all our labourers in a similar situation, they would all be equally comfortable, and equally independent of the parish. This is an inference, however, that by no means follows. The advantage, which cottagers who at present keep cows enjoy, arises in a great measure from its being peculiar, and would be considerably diminished if it were made general.

A farmer or gentleman has, we will suppose, a certain number of cottages on his farm. Being a liberal man, and liking to see all the people about him comfortable, he may join a piece of land to each cottage sufficient to keep one or two cows, and give besides high wages. His labourers

[a] See an Inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the Counties of Lincoln and Rutland, by Robert Gourlay. Annals of Agriculture, vol. xxxvii. p. 514.

will

will of course live in plenty, and be able to rear up large families; but his farm may not require many hands: and though he may choose to pay those that he employs well, he will not probably wish to have more labourers on his land than his work requires. He does not therefore build more houses; and the children of the labourers whom he employs must evidently emigrate, and settle in other countries. While such a system continues peculiar to certain families or certain districts, the emigrants would easily be able to find work in other places; and it cannot be doubted that the individual labourers employed on these farms are in an enviable situation, and such as we might naturally wish was the lot of all our labourers. But it is perfectly clear that such a system could not, in the nature of things, possess the same advantages, if it were made general; because there would then be no countries to which the children could emigrate with the same prospect of finding work. Population would evidently increase beyond the demand of towns and manufactories,

tories, and the price of labour would universally fall.

It should be observed also, that one of the reasons why the labourers who at present keep cows are so comfortable, is, that they are able to make considerable profit of the milk which they do not use themselves; an advantage which would evidently be very much diminished, if the system were universal. And though they were certainly able to struggle through the late scarcities with less assistance than their neighbours, as might naturally be expected, from their having other resources besides the article which in those individual years was scarce; yet if the system were universal, there can be no reason assigned why they would not be subject to suffer as much from a scarcity of grass and a mortality among cows*, as our common labourers

* At present the loss of a cow, which must now and then happen, is generally remedied by a petition and subscription; and as the event is considered as a most serious misfortune to a labourer, these petitions are for the most part attended to; but if the cow system were universal,

labourers do now from a scarcity of wheat. We should be extremely cautious therefore of trusting to such appearances, and of drawing a general inference from this kind of partial experience.

The main principle, on which the society for increasing the comforts and bettering the condition of the poor professes to proceed, is excellent. To give effect to that master-spring of industry, the desire of bettering our condition [a] is the true mode of improving the state of the lower classes; and we may safely agree with Sir Thomas Bernard, in one of his able prefaces, that whatever encourages and promotes habits of industry, prudence, foresight, virtue and cleanliness, among the poor, is beneficial to them and to the country; and whatever removes or diminishes the incitements to any of these qualities is detrimental to the state, and pernicious to the individual [b].

universal, losses would occur so frequently, that they could not possibly be repaired in the same way, and families would be continually dropping from comparative plenty into want.

[a] Preface to vol. ii. of the Reports.

[b] Preface to vol. iii. of the Reports.

Sir

Sir Thomas Bernard indeed himself seems in general to be fully aware of the difficulties, which the society has to contend with in the accomplishment of its object. But still it appears to be in some danger of falling into the error before alluded to, of drawing general inferences from insufficient experience. Without adverting to the plans respecting cheaper foods and parish shops, recommended by individuals, the beneficial effects of which depend entirely upon their being peculiar to certain families or certain parishes, and would be lost if they were general, by lowering the wages of labour; I shall only notice one observation of a more comprehensive nature, which occurs in the preface to the second volume of the Reports. It is there remarked that the experience of the society seemed to warrant the conclusion, that the best mode of relieving the poor was, by assisting them at their own homes, and placing out their children as soon as possible in different employments, apprenticeships, &c. I really believe that this is the best, and it is certainly the most agreeable, mode in which occasional

occasional and discriminate assistance can be given. But it is evident that it must be done with caution, and cannot be adopted as a general principle, and made the foundation of universal practice. It is open exactly to the same objection as the cow system, which has just been noticed, and that part of the act of the 43d of Elizabeth, which directs the overseers to employ and provide for the children of the poor. A particular parish, where all the children, as soon as they were of a proper age, were taken from their parents and placed out in proper situations, might be very comfortable; but if the system were general, and the poor saw that all their children would be thus provided for, every employment would presently be overstocked with hands, and the consequences need not be again repeated.

Nothing can be more clear than that it is within the power of money, and of the exertions of the rich, adequately to relieve a particular family, a particular parish, and even a particular district. But it will be

equally clear, if we reflect a moment on the subject, that it is totally out of their power to relieve the whole country in the same way; at least without providing a regular vent for the overflowing numbers in emigration, or without the prevalence of a particular virtue among the poor, which the distribution of this assistance tends obviously to discourage.

Even industry itself is, in this respect, not very different from money. A man who possesses a certain portion of it, above what is usually possessed by his neighbours, will, in the actual state of things, be almost sure of a competent livelihood; but if all his neighbours were to become at once as industrious as himself, the absolute portion of industry which he before possessed would no longer be a security against want. Hume fell into a great error, when he asserted that "almost all the moral as well "as natural evils of human life arise from "idleness;" and for the cure of these ills required only that the whole species should possess naturally an equal diligence with that,

that, which many individuals are able to attain by habit and reflection *. It is evident that this given degree of industry possessed by the whole species, if not combined with another virtue of which he takes no notice, would totally fail of rescuing society from want and misery, and would scarcely remove a single moral or physical evil of all those to which he alludes.

I am aware of an objection, which will, with great appearance of justice, be urged against the general scope of these reasonings. It will be said that to argue thus is at once to object to every mode of assisting the poor, as it is impossible, in the nature of things, to assist people individually, without altering their relative situation in society, and proportionally depressing others; and that as those who have families are the persons naturally most subject to distress, and as we are certainly not called upon to assist those who do not want our aid, we must necessarily, if we act at all, relieve those who have children, and thus encourage marriage and population.

* Dialogues on Natural Religion, part xi. p. 212.

I have already observed however, and I here repeat it again, that the general principles on these subjects ought not to be pushed too far, though they should always be kept in view; and that many cases may occur, in which the good resulting from the relief of the present distress may more than overbalance the evil to be apprehended from the remote consequence.

All relief in instances of distress, not arising from idle and improvident habits, clearly comes under this description; and in general it may be observed, that it is only that kind of *systematic* and *certain* relief, on which the poor can confidently depend, whatever may be their conduct, that violates general principles in such a manner as to make it clear that the general consequence is worse than the particular evil.

Independently of this discriminate and occasional assistance, the beneficial effects of which I have fully allowed in a preceding chapter, I have before endeavoured to shew. that much might be expected from a better and more general system of education.

Every

Every thing that can be done in this way has indeed a very peculiar value; because education is one of those advantages, which not only all may share without interfering with each other, but the raising of one person may actually contribute to the raising of others. If, for instance, a man by education acquires that decent kind of pride and those juster habits of thinking, which will prevent him from burdening society with a family of children which he cannot support, his conduct, as far as an individual instance can go, tends evidently to improve the condition of his fellow-labourers; and a contrary conduct from ignorance would tend as evidently to depress it.

I cannot help thinking also, that something might be done towards bettering the situation of the poor by a general improvement of their cottages, if care were taken, at the same time, not to make them so large as to allow of two families settling in them; and not to increase their number faster than the demand for labour required. One of the most salutary and least pernicious checks

checks to the frequency of early marriages in this country is the difficulty of procuring a cottage, and the laudable habits which prompt a labourer rather to defer his marriage some years in the expectation of a vacancy, than to content himself with a wretched mud cabin, like those in Ireland [a].

Even the cow system, upon a more confined plan, might not be open to objection. With any view of making it a substitute for the poor-laws, and of giving labourers a right to demand land and cows in proportion to their families; or of taking the common people from the consumption of wheat, and feeding them on milk and potatoes; it appears to me, I confess, truly preposterous:

[a] Perhaps, however, this is not often left to his choice, on account of the fear which every parish has of increasing its poor. There are many ways by which our poor-laws operate in counteracting their first obvious tendency to increase population, and this is one of them. I have little doubt that it is almost exclusively owing to these counteracting causes, that we have been able to persevere in this system so long, and that the condition of the poor has not been so much injured by it as might have been expected.

but

but if it were so ordered as merely to provide a comfortable situation for the better and more industrious labourers, and to supply at the same time a very important want among the poor in general, that of milk for their children; I think that it would be extremely beneficial, and might be made a very powerful incitement to habits of industry, economy and prudence. With this view however, it is evident that only a certain portion of labourers in each parish could be included in the plan; that good conduct, and not mere distress, should have the most valid claim to preference; that too much attention should not be paid to the number of children; and that universally, those who had saved money enough for the purchase of a cow, should be preferred to those who required to be furnished with one by the parish[a].

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[a] The act of Elizabeth, which prohibited the building of cottages, unless four acres of land were annexed to them, is probably impracticable in a manufacturing country like England; but, upon this principle, certainly the greatest part of the poor might possess land; because

One should undoubtedly be extremely unwilling not to make as much use as possible of that known stimulus to industry and economy, the desire of, and attachment to, property: but it should be recollected that the good effects of this stimulus shew themselves principally when this property is to be procured or preserved by personal exertions; and that they are by no means so general under other circumstances. If any idle man with a family could demand and obtain a cow and some land, I should expect to see both very often neglected.

It has been observed that those cottagers, who keep cows, are more industrious and more regular in their conduct, than those who do not. This is probably true, and what might naturally be expected; but the inference that the way to make all people industrious is to give them cows, may by no means be quite so certain. Most of

cause the difficulty of procuring such cottages would always operate as a powerful check to their increase. The effect of such a plan would be very different from that of Mr. Young.

those

those who keep cows at present have purchased them with the fruits of their own industry. It is therefore more just to say that their industry has given them a cow, than that a cow has given them their industry; though I would by no means be understood to imply that the sudden possession of property never generates industrious habits.

The practical good effects, which have been already experienced from cottagers keeping cows[a], arise in fact from the system being nearly such as the confined plan which I have mentioned. In the districts where cottagers of this description most abound, they do not bear a very large proportion to the population of the whole parish; they consist in general of the better sort of labourers, who have been able to purchase their own cows; and the peculiar comforts of their situation arise more from the relative than the positive advantages which they possess.

[a] Inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the Counties of Lincoln and Rutland, by Robert Gourlay. Annals of Agriculture, vol. xxxvii. p. 514.

From

From observing therefore their industry and comforts, we should be very cautious of inferring that we could give the same industry and comforts to all the lower classes of people, by giving them the same possessions. There is nothing, that has given rise to such a cloud of errors, as a confusion between relative and positive, and between cause and effect.

It may be said, however, that any plan of generally improving the cottages of the poor, or of enabling more of them to keep cows, would evidently give them the power of rearing a greater number of children, and, by thus encouraging population, violate the principles which I have endeavoured to establish. But if I have been successful in making the reader comprehend the principal bent of this work, he will be aware that the precise reason why I think that more children ought not to be born than the country can support is, that the greatest possible number of those that are born may be supported. We cannot, in the nature of things, assist the poor in any way, without enabling them to rear up to manhood

manhood a greater number of their children. But this is, of all other things, the most desirable, both with regard to individuals and the public. Every loss of a child from the consequences of poverty must evidently be preceded and accompanied by great misery to individuals; and in a public view, every child that dies under ten years of age is a loss to the nation of all that had been expended in its subsistence till that period. Consequently, in every point of view, a decrease of mortality at all ages is what we ought to aim at. We cannot however effect this object, without first crowding the population in some degree by making more children grow up to manhood; but we shall do no harm in this respect, if, at the same time, we can impress these children with the idea, that, to possess the same advantages as their parents, they must defer marriage till they have a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family. And it must be candidly confessed that, if we cannot do this, all our former efforts will have been thrown away. It is not in the nature of things that any permanent and general

general improvement in the condition of the poor can be effected without an increase in the preventive check; and unless this take place, either with or without our efforts, every thing that is done for the poor must be temporary and partial: a diminution of mortality at present will be balanced by an increased mortality in future; and the improvement of their condition in one place will proportionally depress it in another. This is a truth so important, and so little understood, that it can scarcely be too often insisted on.

Paley, in a chapter on population, provision, &c., in his Moral Philosophy, observes, that the condition most favourable to the population of a country, and at the same time to its general happiness, is "that "of a laborious frugal people ministering "to the demands of an opulent luxurious "nation[a]." Such a form of society has not,

[a] Vol. ii. c. xi. p. 359. From a passage in Paley's Natural Theology, I am inclined to think that subsequent reflection induced him to modify some of his former ideas on the subject of population. He states most justly

not, it must be confessed, an inviting aspect. Nothing but the conviction of its being absolutely necessary could reconcile us to the idea of ten millions of people condemned to incessant toil, and to the privation of every thing but absolute necessaries, in order to minister to the excessive luxuries of the other million. But the fact is, that such a form of society is by no means necessary. It is by no means necessary that the rich should be excessively luxurious, in order to support the manufactures of a country; or that the poor should be deprived of all luxuries, in order to make them sufficiently numerous. The best, and in every point of view the most advantageous manufactures in this country, are those which are consumed by the great body of the people. The manufactures which are confined exclusively to the rich

justly (ch. xxv. p. 539), that mankind will in every country breed up to a certain point of distress. If this be allowed, that country will evidently be the happiest, where the degree of distress at this point is the least; and consequently, if the diffusion of luxury, by producing the check sooner, tend to diminish this degree of distress, it is certainly desirable.

are

are not only trivial, on account of the comparative smallness of their quantity, but are further liable to the great disadvantage of producing much occasional misery among those employed in them, from changes of fashion. It is the diffusion of luxury therefore among the mass of the people, and not an excess of it in a few, that seems to be most advantageous, both with regard to national wealth and national happiness; and what Paley considers as the true evil and proper danger of luxury, I should be disposed to consider as its true good and peculiar advantage. If, indeed, it be allowed that in every society, not in the state of a new colony, some powerful check to population must prevail; and if it be observed that a taste for the comforts and conveniencies of life will prevent people from marrying, under the certainty of being deprived of these advantages; it must be allowed that we can hardly expect to find any check to marriage so little prejudicial to the happiness and virtue of society as the general prevalence of such a taste; and consequently, that the extension of luxury

luxury in this sense of the term is particularly desirable, and one of the best means of raising that standard of wretchedness alluded to in a former chapter.

It has been generally found that the middle parts of society are most favourable to virtuous and industrious habits, and to the growth of all kinds of talents. But it is evident that all cannot be in the middle. Superior and inferior parts are in the nature of things absolutely necessary; and not only necessary, but strikingly beneficial. If no man could hope to rise, or fear to fall in society; if industry did not bring with it its reward, and indolence its punishment; we could not expect to see that animated activity in bettering our condition, which now forms the master-spring of public prosperity. But in contemplating the different states of Europe, we observe a very considerable difference in the relative proportions of the superior, the middle and the inferior parts; and from the effect of these differences it seems probable, that our best-grounded expectations of an increase

crease in the happiness of the mass of human society are founded in the prospect of an increase in the relative proportions of the middle parts. And if the lower classes of people had acquired the habit of proportioning the supplies of labour to a stationary or even decreasing demand, without an increase of misery and mortality, as at present, we might even venture to indulge a hope that at some future period the processes for abridging human labour, the progress of which has of late years been so rapid, might ultimately supply all the wants of the most wealthy society with less personal effort than at present; and if they did not diminish the severity of individual exertion, might, at least, diminish the number of those employed in severe toil. If the lowest classes of society were thus diminished, and the middle classes increased, each labourer might indulge a more rational hope of rising by diligence and exertion into a better station; the rewards of industry and virtue would be increased in number; the lottery of human society would appear to consist of fewer blanks and more prizes;

prizes; and the sum of social happiness would be evidently augmented.

To indulge however in any distant views of this kind, unaccompanied by the evils usually attendant on a stationary or decreasing demand for labour, we must suppose the general prevalence of such prudential habits among the poor, as would prevent them from marrying, when the actual price of labour, joined to what they might have saved in their single state, would not give them the prospect of being able to support a wife and five or six children without assistance. And undoubtedly such a degree of prudential restraint would produce a very striking melioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

It may be said perhaps, that even this degree of prudence might not always avail, as when a man marries he cannot tell what number of children he shall have, and many have more than six. This is certainly true; and in this case I do not think that any evil would result from making a certain allowance to every child above this

number; not with a view of rewarding a man for his large family, but merely of relieving him from a species of distress which it would be unreasonable in us to expect that he should calculate upon. And with this view, the relief should be merely such as to place him exactly in the same situation as if he had had six children. Montesquieu disapproves of an edict of Lewis the Fourteenth, which gave certain pensions to those who had ten and twelve children, as being of no use in encouraging population[a]. For the very reason that he disapproves of it, I should think that some law of the kind might be adopted without danger, and might relieve particular individuals from a very pressing and unlooked-for distress, without operating in any respect as an encouragement to marriage.

If at some future period any approach should be made towards the more general prevalence of prudential habits with respect to marriage among the poor, from which alone any permanent and general improvement of their condition can arise; I do not

[a] Esprit des Loix, liv. xxiii. c. xxvii.

think

think that the narrowest politician need be alarmed at it, from the fear of its occasioning such an advance in the price of labour, as will enable our commercial competitors to undersell us in foreign markets. There are four circumstances that might be expected to accompany it, which would probably either prevent, or fully counterbalance, any effect of this kind. These are, 1st, the more equable and lower price of provisions, from the demand being less frequently above the supply. 2dly, the removal of that heavy burden on agriculture, and that great addition to the present wages of labour, the poor's rates. 3dly, the national saving of a great part of that sum, which is expended without return in the support of those children, who die prematurely from the consequences of poverty. And, lastly, the more general prevalence of economical and industrious habits, particularly among unmarried men, which would prevent that indolence, drunkenness and waste of labour which at present are too frequently a consequence of high wages.

CHAP. XIV.

Of our rational Expectations respecting the future Improvement of Society.

IN taking a general and concluding view of our rational expectations respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population, it may be observed that though the increase of population in a geometrical ratio be incontrovertible, and the period of doubling, when unchecked, has been uniformly stated in this work rather below than above the truth; yet there are some natural consequences of the progress of society and civilization, which necessarily repress its full effects. These are, more particularly, great towns and manufactures, in which we can scarcely hope, and certainly not expect, to see any very material change. It is undoubtedly our duty, and in every point of view highly desirable, to make towns and manufacturing

turing employments as little injurious as possible to the duration of human life; but, after all our efforts, it is probable that they will always remain less healthy than country situations and country employments; and consequently, operating as positive checks, will diminish in some degree the necessity of the preventive check.

In every old state, it is observed that a considerable number of grown-up people remain for a time unmarried. The duty of practising the common and acknowledged rules of morality during this period has never been controverted in theory, however it may have been opposed in practice. This branch of the duty of moral restraint has scarcely been touched by the reasonings of this work. It rests on the same foundation as before, neither stronger nor weaker. And knowing how incompletely this duty has hitherto been fulfilled, it would certainly be visionary to expect that it would be completely fulfilled.

The part which has been affected by the reasonings of this work is not therefore that which relates to our conduct during the period

period of celibacy, but to the duty of extending this period till we have a prospect of being able to maintain our children. And it is by no means visionary to indulge a hope of some favourable change in this respect; because it is found by experience that the prevalence of this kind of prudential restraint is extremely different in different countries, and in the same countries at different periods.

It cannot be doubted that throughout Europe in general, and most particularly in the northern states, a decided change has taken place in the operation of this prudential restraint, since the prevalence of those warlike and enterprising habits which destroyed so many people. In later times the gradual diminution and almost total extinction of the plagues, which so frequently visited Europe in the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, produced a change of the same kind. And in this country, it is not to be doubted that the proportion of marriages has become smaller, since the improvement of our towns, the less frequent returns of epidemics

epidemics and the adoption of habits of greater cleanliness. During the late scarcities it appears that the number of marriages diminished [a]; and the same motives, which prevented many people from marrying during such a period, would operate precisely in the same way, if, in future, the additional number of children reared to manhood from the introduction of the cow-pox, were to be such as to crowd all employments, lower the price of labour and make it more difficult to support a family.

Universally, the practice of mankind on the subject of marriage has been much superior to their theories; and however frequent may have been the declamations on the duty of entering into this state, and the advantage of early unions to prevent vice, each individual has practically found it necessary to consider of the means of supporting a family, before he ventured to take so important a step. That great *vis medicatrix reipublicæ*, the desire of bettering our condition, and the fear of making it worse, has been constantly in action, and

[a] 1800 and 1801.

has

has been constantly directing people into the right road, in spite of all the declamations which tended to lead them aside. Owing to this powerful spring of health in every state, which is nothing more than an inference from the general course of the laws of nature irresistibly forced on each man's attention, the prudential check to marriage has increased in Europe; and it cannot be unreasonable to conclude that it will still make further advances. If this take place without any marked and decided increase of a vicious intercourse with the sex, the happiness of society will evidently be promoted by it; and with regard to the danger of such increase, it is consolatory to remark that those countries in Europe, where marriages are the least latest or frequent, are by no means particularly distinguished by vices of this kind. It has appeared, that Norway, Switzerland, England and Scotland are above all the rest in the prevalence of the preventive check; and though I do not mean to insist particularly on the virtuous habits of these countries, yet I think that no person would select them as the countries

tries most marked for profligacy of manners. Indeed, from the little that I know of the continent, I should have been inclined to select them as most distinguished for contrary habits, and as rather above than below their neighbours in the chastity of their women, and consequently in the virtuous habits of their men. Experience therefore seems to teach us that it is possible for moral and physical causes to counteract the effects that might at first be expected from an increase of the check to marriage; but allowing all the weight to these effects which is in any degree probable, it may be safely asserted, that the diminution of the vices arising from indigence would fully counterbalance them; and that all the advantages of diminished mortality and superior comforts, which would certainly result from an increase of the preventive check, may be placed entirely on the side of the gains to the cause of happiness and virtue.

It is less the object of the present work to propose new plans of improving society, than to inculcate the necessity of resting contented

contented with that mode of improvement which is dictated by the course of nature, and of not obstructing the advances which would otherwise be made in this way.

It would be undoubtedly highly advantageous that all our positive institutions, and the whole tenour of our conduct to the poor, should be such as actively to co-operate with that lesson of prudence inculcated by the common course of human events; and if we take upon ourselves sometimes to mitigate the natural punishments of imprudence, that we could balance it by increasing the rewards of an opposite conduct. But much would be done, if merely the institutions which directly tend to encourage marriage were gradually changed, and we ceased to circulate opinions and inculcate doctrines, which positively counteract the lessons of nature.

The limited good, which it is sometimes in our power to effect, is often lost by attempting too much, and by making the adoption of some particular plan essentially necessary even to a partial degree of success. In the practical application of the reasonings

reasonings of this work, I hope that I have avoided this error. I wish to press on the recollection of the reader, that, though I may have given some new views of old facts, and may have indulged in the contemplation of a considerable degree of *possible* improvement, that I might not shut out that prime cheerer hope; yet in my expectations of probable improvement and in suggesting the means of accomplishing it, I have been very cautious. The gradual abolition of the poor-laws, has already often been proposed, in consequence of the practical evils which have been found to flow from them, and the danger of their becoming a weight absolutely intolerable on the landed property of the kingdom. The establishment of a more extensive system of national education has neither the advantage of novelty with some, nor its disadvantages with others, to recommend it. The practical good effects of education have long been experienced in Scotland; and almost every person who has been placed in a situation to judge, has given his testimony that education appears to have a considerable effect

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in the prevention of crimes [a], and the promotion of industry, morality and regular conduct. Yet these are the only plans which have been offered; and though the adoption of them in the modes suggested would very powerfully contribute to forward the object of this work and better the condition of the poor; yet if nothing be done in this way, I shall not absolutely despair of some partial good resulting from general effects of the reasoning.

If the principles which I have endeavoured to establish be false, I most sincerely hope to see them completely refuted; but if they be true, the subject is so important, and interests the question of human happiness so nearly, that it is impossible

[a] Mr. Howard found fewer prisoners in Switzerland and Scotland than in other countries, which he attributed to a more regular education among the lower classes of the Swiss and the Scotch. During the number of years which the late Mr. Fielding presided at Bow-street, only six Scotchmen were brought before him. He used to say, that of the persons committed the greater part were Irish. Preface to vol. iii. of the Reports of the Society for bettering the Condition of the Poor, p. 32.

they

they should not in time be more fully known and more generally circulated, whether any particular efforts be made for the purpose or not.

Among the higher and middle classes of society, the effect of this knowledge will, I hope, be to direct without relaxing their efforts in bettering the condition of the poor; to shew them what they can and what they cannot do; and that, although much may be done by advice and instruction, by encouraging habits of prudence and cleanliness, by discriminate charity, and by any mode of bettering the present condition of the poor which is followed by an increase of the preventive check; yet that, without this last effect, all the former efforts would be futile; and that, in any old and well-peopled state, to assist the poor in such a manner as to enable them to marry as early as they please, and rear up large families, is a physical impossibility. This knowledge, by tending to prevent the rich from destroying the good effects of their own exertions, and wasting their efforts in a direction where success is unattainable, would

would confine their attention to the proper objects, and thus enable them to do more good.

Among the poor themselves, its effects would be still more important. That the principal and most permanent cause of poverty has little or no *direct* relation to forms of government, or the unequal division of property; and that, as the rich do not in reality possess the *power* of finding employment and maintenance for the poor, the poor cannot, in the nature of things, possess the *right* to demand them; are important truths flowing from the principle of population, which, when properly explained, would by no means be above the most ordinary comprehensions. And it is evident that every man in the lower classes of society, who became acquainted with these truths, would be disposed to bear the distresses in which he might be involved with more patience; would feel less discontent and irritation at the government and the higher classes of society, on account of his poverty; would be on all occasions less disposed to insubordination and turbulence; and

and if he received assistance, either from any public institution or from the hand of private charity, he would receive it with more thankfulness, and more justly appreciate its value.

If these truths were by degrees more generally known (which in the course of time does not seem to be improbable from the natural effects of the mutual interchange of opinions), the lower classes of people, as a body, would become more peaceable and orderly, would be less inclined to tumultuous proceedings in seasons of scarcity, and would at all times be less influenced by inflammatory and seditious publications, from knowing how little the price of labour and the means of supporting a family depend upon a revolution. The mere knowledge of these truths, even if they did not operate sufficiently to produce any marked change in the prudential habits of the poor with regard to marriage, would still have a most beneficial effect on their conduct in a political light; and undoubtedly, one of the most valuable of these effects would be the power, that would result to the higher

and

and middle classes of society, of gradually improving their governments*, without the apprehension of those revolutionary excesses, the fear of which, at present, threatens to deprive Europe even of that degree of liberty, which she had before experienced to be practicable, and the salutary effects of which she had long enjoyed.

From a review of the state of society in former periods, compared with the present, I should certainly say that the evils resulting from the principle of population have rather diminished than increased, even under the disadvantage of an almost total ignorance of their real cause. And if we can indulge the hope that this ignorance will be gradually dissipated, it does not

* I cannot believe that the removal of all unjust grounds of discontent against constituted authorities would render the people torpid and indifferent to advantages, which are really attainable. The blessings of civil liberty are so great that they surely cannot need the aid of false colouring to make them desirable. I should be sorry to think that the lower classes of people could never be animated to assert their rights but by means of such illusory promises, as will generally make the remedy of resistance much worse than the disease which it was intended to cure.

seem

seem unreasonable to expect that they will be still further diminished. The increase of absolute population, which will of course take place, will evidently tend but little to weaken this expectation, as every thing depends upon the relative proportion between population and food, and not on the absolute number of people. In the former part of this work it appeared that the countries, which possessed the fewest people, often suffered the most from the effects of the principle of population; and it can scarcely be doubted that, taking Europe throughout, fewer famines and fewer diseases arising from want have prevailed in the last century than in those which preceded it.

On the whole therefore, though our future prospects respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population may not be so bright as we could wish, yet they are far from being entirely disheartening, and by no means preclude that gradual and progressive improvement in human society, which, before the late wild speculations on this subject, was the object of rational expectation. To the laws

of property and marriage, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love which prompts each individual to exert himself in bettering his condition, we are indebted for all the noblest exertions of human genius, for every thing that distinguishes the civilized from the savage state. A strict inquiry into the principle of population obliges us to conclude that we shall never be able to throw down the ladder, by which we have risen to this eminence; but it by no means proves, that we may not rise higher by the same means. The structure of society, in its great features, will probably always remain unchanged. We have every reason to believe that it will always consist of a class of proprietors and a class of labourers; but the condition of each, and the proportion which they bear to each other, may be so altered, as greatly to improve the harmony and beauty of the whole. It would indeed be a melancholy reflection that, while the views of physical science are daily enlarging, so as scarcely to be bounded by the most distant horizon, the science of moral and political philosophy

sophy should be confined within such narrow limits, or at best be so feeble in its influence, as to be unable to counteract the obstacles to human happiness arising from a single cause. But however formidable these obstacles may have appeared in some parts of this work, it is hoped that the general result of the inquiry is such, as not to make us give up the improvement of human society in despair. The partial good which seems to be attainable is worthy of all our exertions; is sufficient to direct our efforts, and animate our prospects. And although we cannot expect that the virtue and happiness of mankind will keep pace with the brilliant career of physical discovery; yet if we are not wanting to ourselves, we may confidently indulge the hope that, to no unimportant extent, they will be influenced by its progress and will partake in its success.

APPENDIX.

IN the preface to the second edition of this Essay, I expressed a hope that the detailed manner, in which I had treated the subject and pursued it to its consequences, though it might open the door to many objections, and expose me to much severity of criticism, might be subservient to the important end of bringing a subject so nearly connected with the happiness of society into more general notice. Conformably to the same views I should always have felt willing to enter into the discussion of any serious objections that were made to my principles or conclusions, to abandon those which appeared to be false, and to throw further lights, if I could, on those which appeared to be true. But though the work has excited a degree of public attention much greater than I could have presumed to expect, yet very little has been written to controvert it; and of that little, the

the greatest part is so full of illiberal declamation, and so entirely destitute of argument, as to be evidently beneath notice. What I have to say therefore at present, will be directed rather more to the objections which have been urged in conversation, than to those which have appeared in print. My object is to correct some of the misrepresentations which have gone abroad respecting two or three of the most important points of the Essay; and I should feel greatly obliged to those who have not had leisure to read the whole work, if they would cast their eyes over the few following pages, that they may not, from the partial and incorrect statements which they have heard, mistake the import of some of my opinions, and attribute to me others which I have never held.

The first grand objection that has been made to my principles is, that they contradict the original command of the Creator, to increase and multiply and replenish the earth. But those who have urged this objection have certainly either not read the work, or have directed their attention solely to a few detached passages, and have been unable to seize the bent and spirit of the whole. I am fully of opinion, that it is the duty of man to obey this command of his Creator; nor is there, in my recollection, a single

a single passage in the work, which, taken with the context, can, to any reader of intelligence, warrant the contrary inference.

Every express command given to man by his Creator is given in subordination to those great and uniform laws of nature, which he had previously established; and we are forbidden both by reason and religion to expect that these laws will be changed in order to enable us to execute more readily any particular precept. It is undoubtedly true that, if man were enabled miraculously to live without food, the earth would be very rapidly replenished: but as we have not the slightest ground of hope that such a miracle will be worked for this purpose, it becomes our positive duty as reasonable creatures, and with a view of executing the commands of our Creator, to inquire into the laws which he has established for the multiplication of the species. And when we find, not only from the speculative contemplation of these laws, but from the far more powerful and imperious suggestions of our senses, that man cannot live without food, it is a folly exactly of the same *kind* to attempt to obey the will of our Creator by increasing population without reference to the means of its support, as to attempt to obtain an abundant crop of corn by sowing it on the way-side and in hedges, where it cannot

not receive its proper nourishment. Which is it, I would ask, that best seconds the benevolent intentions of the Creator in covering the earth with esculent vegetables, he who with care and foresight duly ploughs and prepares a piece of ground, and sows no more seed than he expects will grow up to maturity, or he who scatters a profusion of seed indifferently over the land, without reference to the soil on which it falls, or any previous preparation for its reception?

It is an utter misconception of my argument to infer that I am an enemy to population. I am only an enemy to vice and misery, and consequently to that unfavourable proportion between population and food, which produces these evils. But this unfavourable proportion has no necessary connexion with the quantity of absolute population which a country may contain. On the contrary, it is more frequently found in countries which are very thinly peopled, than in those which are populous.

The bent of my argument on the subject of population may be illustrated by the instance of a pasture farm. If a young grazier were told to stock his land well, as on his stock would depend his profits and the ultimate success of his undertaking, he would certainly have been told nothing but what was strictly true: and

and he would have to accuse himself, not his advisers, if, in pursuance of these instructions, he were to push the breeding of his cattle till they became lean and half-starved. His instructor, when he talked of the advantages of a large stock, meant undoubtedly stock in proper condition, and not such a stock as, though it might be numerically greater, was in value much less. The expression of stocking a farm well does not refer to particular numbers, but merely to that proportion which is best adapted to the farm, whether it be a poor or a rich one, whether it will carry fifty head of cattle or five hundred. It is undoubtedly extremely desirable that it should carry the greater number, and every effort should be made to effect this object: but surely that farmer could not be considered as an enemy to a large quantity of stock, who should insist upon the folly and impropriety of attempting to breed such a quantity, before the land was put into a condition to bear it.

The arguments which I have used respecting the increase of population are exactly of the same nature as these just mentioned. I believe that it is the intention of the Creator that the earth should be replenished*; but certainly

* This opinion I have expressed, page 491 of the 4to. edit. and p. 79, vol. iii. of this edit.

with

with a healthy, virtuous and happy population, not an unhealthy, vicious and miserable one. And if, in endeavouring to obey the command to increase and multiply, we people it only with beings of this latter description and suffer accordingly, we have no right to impeach the justice of the command, but our irrational mode of executing it.

In the desirableness of a great and efficient population, I do not differ from the warmest advocates of increase. I am perfectly ready to acknowledge with the writers of old that it is not extent of territory, but extent of population that measures the power of states. It is only as to the mode of obtaining a vigorous and efficient population that I differ from them; and in thus differing I conceive myself entirely borne out by experience, that great test of all human speculations.

It appears from the undoubted testimony of registers, that a large proportion of marriages and births is by no means necessarily connected with a rapid increase of population, but is often found in countries where it is either stationary or increasing very slowly. The population of such countries is not only comparatively inefficient from the general poverty and misery of the inhabitants, but invariably contains a much larger proportion of persons in those stages of life,

life, in which they are unable to contribute their share to the resources or the defence of the state.

This is most strikingly illustrated in an instance which I have quoted from M. Muret, in a chapter on Switzerland, where it appeared, that in proportion to the same population, the Lyonais produced 16 births, the Pays de Vaud 11, and a particular parish in the Alps only 8; but that at the age of 20 these three very different numbers were all reduced to the same*. In the Lyonais nearly half of the population was under the age of puberty, in the Pays de Vaud one-third, and in the parish of the Alps only one-fourth. The inference from such facts is unavoidable, and of the highest importance to society.

The power of a country to increase its resources or defend its possessions must depend principally upon its efficient population, upon that part of the population which is of an age to be employed effectually in agriculture, commerce or war; but it appears with an evidence little short of demonstration, that in a country, the resources of which do not naturally call for a larger proportion of births, such an increase, so far from tending to increase this efficient

* Page 271, 4to. edit. and p. 472, vol. i. of this edit.

population,

population, would tend materially to diminish it. It would undoubtedly, at first, increase the number of souls in proportion to the means of subsistence, and therefore cruelly increase the pressure of want; but the numbers of persons rising annually to the age of puberty might not be so great as before, a larger part of the produce would be distributed without return to children who would never reach manhood, and the additional population, instead of giving additional strength to the country, would essentially lessen this strength and operate as a constant obstacle to the creation of new resources.

We are a little dazzled at present by the population and power of France, and it is known that she has always had a large proportion of births: but if any reliance can be placed on what are considered as the best authorities on this subject, it is quite certain that the advantages which she enjoys do not arise from any thing peculiar in the structure of her population; but solely from the great absolute quantity of it, derived from her immense extent of fertile territory.

Necker, speaking of the population of France, says that it is so composed, that a million of individuals present neither the same force in war, nor the same capacity for labour, as an equal number in a country where the people are

are less oppressed and fewer die in infancy[a]. And the view which Arthur Young has given of the state of the lower classes of the people at the time he travelled in France, which was just at the commencement of the revolution, leads directly to the same conclusion. According to the *Statistique Générale et Particulière de la France*, lately published, the proportion of the population under twenty is almost $\frac{9}{20}$; in England it is probably not much more than $\frac{7}{20}$[b]. Consequently

[a] Necker sur les Finances, tom. i. ch. ix. p. 263, 12mo.

[b] I do not mention these numbers here, as vouching in any degree for their accuracy, but merely for the sake of illustrating the subject. Unfortunately there are no data respecting the classifications of the population of different countries according to age, on which any reliance can be placed with safety. I have reason to think that those given in the *Statistique Générale* were not taken from actual enumerations; and the proportion of the population under 20, mentioned in the text for England, is entirely conjectural, and certainly too small. Of this, however, we may be quite sure, that when two countries, from the proportion of their births to deaths, increase nearly at the same rate, the one, in which the births and deaths bear the greatest proportion to the whole population, will have the smallest comparative number of persons above the age of puberty. That England and Scotland have, in every million of people which they contain,

Consequently out of a population of ten millions England would have a million more of persons above twenty than France, and would upon this supposition have at least three or four hundred thousand more males of a military age. If our population were of the same description as that of France, it must be increased

contain, more individuals fit for labour than France, the data we have are sufficient to determine; but in what degree this difference exists cannot be ascertained, without better information than we at present possess. On account of the more rapid increase of population in England than in France before the revolution, England ought, *cæteris paribus*, to have had the largest proportion of births; yet in France the proportion was $\frac{1}{25}$ or $\frac{1}{26}$, and in England only $\frac{1}{30}$.

The proportion of persons capable of bearing arms has been sometimes calculated at one-fourth, and sometimes at one-fifth, of the whole population of a country. The reader will be aware of the prodigious difference between the two estimates, supposing them to be applicable to two different countries. In the one case, a population of twenty millions would yield five millions of effective men; and in the other case, the same population would only yield four millions. We cannot surely doubt which of the two kinds of population would be of the most valuable description, both with regard to actual strength and the creation of fresh resources. Probably, however, there are no two countries in Europe in which the difference in this respect is so great as that between one-fourth and one-fifth.

numerically

numerically by more than a million and a half, in order to enable us to produce from England and Wales the same number of persons above the age of twenty as at present; and if we had only an increase of a million, our efficient strength in agriculture, commerce and war, would be in the most decided manner diminished, while at the same time the distresses of the lower classes would be dreadfully increased. Can any rational man say that an additional population of this description would be desirable, either in a moral or political view? And yet this is the kind of population which invariably results from direct encouragements to marriage, or from the want of that personal respectability which is occasioned by ignorance and despotism.

It may perhaps be true that France fills her armies with greater facility and less interruption to the usual labours of her inhabitants than England; and it must be acknowledged that poverty and want of employment are powerful aids to a recruiting serjeant; but it would not be a very humane project to keep our people always in want, for the sake of enlisting them cheaper; nor would it be a very politic project to diminish our wealth and strength with the same economical view. We cannot attain incompatible objects. If we possess the advantage of being able to keep nearly all our people

people constantly employed, either in agriculture or commerce, we cannot expect to retain the opposite advantage of their being always at leisure, and willing to enlist for a very small sum*. But we may rest perfectly assured that while we have the efficient population, we shall never want men to fill our armies, if we propose to them adequate motives.

In many parts of the Essay I have dwelt much on the advantage of rearing the requisite population of any country from the smallest number of births. I have stated expressly, that a decrease of mortality at all ages is what we ought chiefly to aim at; and as the best criterion of happiness and good government, instead of the largeness of the proportion of births, which was the usual mode of judging, I have proposed the smallness of the proportion dying under the age of puberty. Conscious that I had never intentionally deviated from these principles, I might well be rather surprised to hear that I had been considered by some as an enemy to the introduction of the vaccine inoculation, which is calculated to at-

* This subject is strikingly illustrated in Lord Selkirk's lucid and masterly observations "On the present State of the Highlands, and on the Causes and probable Consequences of Emigration," to which I can with confidence refer the reader.

tain

tain the very end which I have uniformly considered as so desirable. I have indeed intimated what I still continue most firmly to believe, that if the resources of the country would not permanently admit of a greatly accelerated rate of increase in the population (and whether they would or not must certainly depend upon other causes besides the number of lives saved by the vaccine innoculation)[a], one of two things would happen, either an increased mortality of some other diseases, or a diminution in the proportion of births. But I have expressed my conviction that the latter effect would take place; and therefore consistently with the opinions which I have always maintained, I ought to be, and am, one of the warmest friends to the introduction of the cow-pox. In making every exertion which I think likely to be effectual, to increase the comforts and diminish the mortality among the poor, I act in the most exact conformity to my principles. Whether those are equally consistent who pro-

[a] It should be remarked however, that a young person saved from death is more likely to contribute to the creation of fresh resources than another birth. It is a great loss of labour and food to begin over again. And universally it is true that, under similar circumstances, that article will come the cheapest to market, which is accompanied by fewest failures.

fess to have the same object in view, and yet measure the happiness of nations by the large proportion of marriages and births, is a point which they would do well to consider.

It has been said by some, that the natural checks to population will always be sufficient to keep it within bounds, without resorting to any other aids; and one ingenious writer has remarked that I have not deduced a single original fact from real observations, to prove the inefficiency of the checks which already prevail*. These remarks are correctly true, and are truisms exactly of the same kind as the assertion that man cannot live without food. For, undoubtedly as long as this continues to be a law of his nature, what are here called the natural checks cannot possibly fail of being effectual. Besides the curious truism that these assertions involve, they proceed upon the very strange supposition, that the *ultimate* object of my work is to check population; as if any thing could be more desirable than the most rapid increase of population, unaccompanied by vice and misery. But of course my ultimate object is to diminish vice and misery, and any

* I should like much to know what description of facts this gentleman had in view, when he made this observation. If I could have found one of the kind, which seems here to be alluded to, it would indeed have been truly original.

checks

checks to population, which may have been suggested, are solely as means to accomplish this end. To a rational being, the prudential check to population ought to be considered as equally natural with the check from poverty and premature mortality which these gentlemen seem to think so entirely sufficient and satisfactory; and it will readily occur to the intelligent reader, that one class of checks may be substituted for another, not only without essentially diminishing the population of a country, but even under a constantly progressive increase of it[a].

On the possibility of increasing very considerably the effective population of this country, I have expressed myself in some parts of my work more sanguinely, perhaps, than experience would warrant. I have said, that in the course of some centuries it might contain two or three times as many inhabitants as at present, and yet every person be both better fed and better clothed[b]. And in the comparison of the increase of population and food at the beginning of the Essay, that the argument might not seem

[a] Both Norway and Switzerland, where the preventive check prevails the most, are increasing with some rapidity in their population; and in proportion to their means of subsistence, they can produce more males of a military age than any other country of Europe.

[b] P. 512, 4to. edit. p. 117, vol. iii. of this edit.

to depend upon a difference of opinion respecting facts, I have allowed the produce of the earth to be unlimited, which is certainly going too far. It is not a little curious therefore, that it should still continue to be urged against me as an argument, that this country might contain two or three times as many inhabitants; and it is still more curious, that some persons, who have allowed the different ratios of increase on which all my principal conclusions are founded, have still asserted that no difficulty or distress could arise from population, till the productions of the earth could not be further increased. I doubt whether a stronger instance could readily be produced of the total absence of the power of reasoning, than this assertion, after such a concession, affords. It involves a greater absurdity than the saying that because a farm can by proper management be made to carry an additional stock of four head of cattle every year, that therefore no difficulty or inconvenience would arise if an additional forty were placed in it yearly.

The power of the earth to produce subsistence is certainly not unlimited, but it is strictly speaking indefinite; that is, its limits are not defined, and the time will probably never arrive when we shall be able to say that no further labour or ingenuity of man could make

further

further additions to it. But the power of obtaining an additional quantity of food from the earth by proper management, and in a certain time, has the most remote relation imaginable to the power of keeping pace with an unrestricted increase of population. The knowledge and industry, which would enable the natives of New Holland to make the best use of the natural resources of their country, must, without an absolute miracle, come to them gradually and slowly; and even then, as it has amply appeared, would be perfectly ineffectual as to the grand object; but the passions which prompt to the increase of population are always in full vigour, and are ready to produce their full effect even in a state of the most helpless ignorance and barbarism. It will be readily allowed, that the reason why New Holland, in proportion to its natural powers, is not so populous as China, is the want of those human institutions which protect property and encourage industry; but the misery and vice which prevail almost equally in both countries, from the tendency of population to increase faster than the means of subsistence, form a distinct consideration, and arise from a distinct cause. They arise from the incomplete discipline of the human passions; and no person with the slightest knowledge of mankind has ever had the hardihood to affirm that human institutions could

could completely discipline all the human passions. But I have already treated this subject so fully in the course of the work, that I am ashamed to add any thing further here.

The next grand objection which has been urged against me, is my denial of the *right* of the poor to support.

Those who would maintain this objection with any degree of consistency, are bound to shew, that the different ratios of increase with respect to population and food, which I attempted to establish at the beginning of the Essay, are fundamentally erroneous; since on the supposition of their being true, the conclusion is inevitable. If it appear, as it must appear on these ratios being allowed, that it is not possible for the industry of man to produce sufficient food for all that would be born, if every person were to marry at the time when he was first prompted to it by inclination, it follows irresistibly, that all cannot have a *right* to support. Let us for a moment suppose an equal division of property in any country. If under these circumstances one half of the society were by prudential habits so to regulate their increase, that it exactly kept pace with their increasing cultivation, it is evident that the individuals of this portion of society would always remain as rich as at first.

If

If the other half during the same time married at the age of puberty, when they would probably feel most inclined to it, it is evident that they would soon become wretchedly poor. But upon what plea of justice or equity could this second half of the society claim a right, in virtue of their poverty, to any of the possessions of the first half? This poverty had arisen entirely from their own ignorance or imprudence; and it would be perfectly clear, from the manner in which it had come upon them, that if their plea were admitted, and they were not suffered to feel the particular evils resulting from their conduct, the whole society would shortly be involved in the same degree of wretchedness. Any voluntary and temporary assistance, which might be given as a measure of charity by the richer members of the society to the others, while they were learning to make a better use of the lessons of nature, would be quite a distinct consideration, and without doubt most properly applied; but nothing like a claim of *right* to support can possibly be maintained, till we deny the premises; till we affirm that the American increase of population is a miracle, and does not arise from the greater facility of obtaining the means of subsistence*.

In

* It has been said that I have written a quarto volume to prove,

In fact, whatever we may say in our declamations on this subject, almost the whole of our *conduct* is founded on the non-existence of this right. If the poor had really a claim of *right* to support, I do not think that any man could justify his wearing broad cloth, or eating as much meat as he likes for dinner; and those who assert this right, and yet are rolling in their carriages, living every day luxuriously and keeping even their horses on food of which their fellow-creatures are in want, must be allowed to act with the greatest inconsistency. Taking an individual instance without reference to consequences, it appears to me that Mr. God-

prove, that population increases in a geometrical," and food in an arithmetical ratio; but this is not quite true. The first of these propositions I considered as proved the moment the American increase was related, and the second proposition as soon as it was enunciated. The chief object of my work was to inquire what effects these laws, which I considered as established in the first six pages, had produced, and were likely to produce, on society; a subject not very readily exhausted. The principal fault of my details is, that they are not sufficiently particular; but this was a fault which it was not in my power to remedy. It would be a most curious, and, to every philosophical mind, a most interesting, piece of information, to know the exact share of the full power of increase which each existing check prevents; but at present I see no mode of obtaining such information.

win's

win's argument is irresistible. Can it be pretended for a moment that a part of the mutton which I expect to eat to-day would not be much more beneficially employed on some hard-working labourer, who has not perhaps tasted animal food for the last week, or on some poor family, who cannot command sufficient food of any kind fully to satisfy the cravings of hunger? If these instances were not of a nature to multiply in proportion as such wants were indiscriminately gratified, the gratification of them, as it would be practicable, would be highly beneficial; and in this case I should not have the smallest hesitation in most fully allowing the right. But as it appears clearly, both from theory and experience, that, if the claim were allowed, it would soon increase beyond the *possibility* of satisfying it; and that the practical attempt to do so would involve the human race in the most wretched and universal poverty; it follows necessarily that our conduct, which denies the right, is more suited to the present state of our being, than our declamations which allow it.

The great Author of nature, indeed, with that wisdom which is apparent in all his works, has not left this conclusion to the cold and speculative consideration of general consequences. By making the passion of self-love beyond comparison stronger

stronger than the passion of benevolence, he has at once impelled us to that line of conduct, which is essential to the preservation of the human race. If all that might be born could be adequately supplied, we cannot doubt, that he would have made the desire of giving to others as ardent as that of supplying ourselves. But since, under the present constitution of things, this is not so, he has enjoined every man to pursue, as his primary object, his own safety and happiness, and the safety and happiness of those immediately connected with him; and it is highly instructive to observe that, in proportion as the sphere contracts and the power of giving effectual assistance increases, the desire increases at the same time. In the case of children, who have certainly a claim of *right* to the support and protection of their parents, we generally find parental affection nearly as strong as self-love: and except in a few anomalous cases, the last morsel will be divided into equal shares.

By this wise provision the most ignorant are led to promote the general happiness, an end which they would have totally failed to attain, if the moving principle of their conduct had been benevolence*. Benevolence indeed, as the

* In saying this let me not be supposed to give the slightest

the great and constant source of action, would require the most perfect knowledge of causes and effects, and therefore can only be the attribute of the Deity. In a being so short-sighted as man, it would lead into the grossest errors, and soon transform the fair and cultivated soil of civilized society into a dreary scene of want and confusion.

But though benevolence cannot in the present state of our being be the great moving principle of human actions, yet, as the kind corrector of the evils arising from the other stronger passion, it is essential to human happiness; it is the balm and consolation and grace of human life, the source of our noblest efforts in the cause of virtue, and of our purest and most refined pleasures. Conformably to that system of general laws, according to which the Supreme Being appears with very few exceptions to act, a passion so strong and general as self-love could not prevail without producing much partial evil: and to prevent this passion from degenerating into the odious vice of

slightest sanction to the system of morals inculcated in the *Fable of the Bees*, a system which I consider as absolutely false, and directly contrary to the just definition of virtue. The great art of Dr. Mandeville consisted in misnomers.

selfishness,

selfishness[a], to make us sympathize in the pains and pleasures of our fellow-creatures, and feel the same *kind* of interest in their happiness and misery as in our own, though diminished in degree; to prompt us often to put ourselves in their place, that we may understand their wants, acknowledge their rights and do them good as we have opportunity; and to remind us continually, that even the passion which urges us to procure plenty for ourselves was not implanted in us for our own exclusive advantage, but as the means of procuring the greatest plenty for all; these appear to be the objects and offices of benevolence. In every situation of life there is ample room for the exercise of this virtue: and as each individual rises in society, as he advances in knowledge and excellence, as his power of doing good to others becomes greater, and the necessary attention to his own wants less, it will naturally come in for an increasing share among his constant motives of action.

[a] It seems proper to make a decided distinction between self-love and selfishness, between that passion, which under proper regulations is the source of all honourable industry, and of all the necessaries and conveniences of life, and the same passion pushed to excess, when it becomes useless and disgusting, and consequently vicious.

In

In situations of high trust and influence it ought to have a very large share, and in all public institutions it should be the great moving principle. Though we have often reason to fear that our benevolence may not take the most beneficial direction, we need never apprehend that there will be too much of it in society. The foundations of that passion on which our preservation depends, are fixed so deeply in our nature, that no reasonings or addresses to our feelings can essentially disturb it. It is just therefore and proper that all the positive precepts should be on the side of the weaker impulse; and we may safely endeavour to increase and extend its influence as much as we are able, if at the same time we are constantly on the watch, to prevent the evil which may arise from its misapplication.

The law, which in this country entitles the poor to relief, is undoubtedly different from a full acknowledgment of the natural right; and from this difference, and the many counteracting causes that arise from the mode of its execution, it will not of course be attended with the same consequences. But still it is an approximation to a full acknowledgment, and as such appears to produce much evil, both with regard to the habits and the temper of the poor. I have in consequence ventured to suggest

suggest a plan of gradual abolition, which, as might be expected, has not met with universal approbation. I can readily understand any objections that may be made to it on the plea, that, the right having been once acknowledged in this country, the revocation of it might at first excite discontents; and I should therefore most fully concur in the propriety of proceeding with the greatest caution, and of using all possible means of preventing any sudden shock to the opinions of the poor. But I have never been able to comprehend the grounds of the further assertion, which I have sometimes heard made, that if the poor were really convinced that they had no claim of right to relief, they would in general be more inclined to be discontented and seditious. On these occasions, the only way I have of judging is to put myself in imagination in the place of the poor man, and consider how I should feel in his situation. If I were told that the rich by the laws of nature and the laws of the land were bound to support me, I could not, in the first place, feel much obligation for such support; and, in the next place, if I were given any food of an inferior kind, and could not see the absolute necessity of the change, which would probably be the case, I should think that I had good reason to complain. I should feel, that the laws had been

been violated to my injury, and that I had been unjustly deprived of my right. Under these circumstances, though I might be deterred by the fear of an armed force from committing any overt acts of resistance, yet I should consider myself as perfectly justified in so doing, if this fear were removed; and the injury, which I believed that I had suffered, might produce the most unfavourable effects on my general dispositions towards the higher classes of society. I cannot indeed conceive any thing more irritating to the human feelings, than to experience that degree of distress, which, in spite of all our poor-laws and benevolence, is not unfrequently felt in this country; and yet to believe that these sufferings were not brought upon me either by my own faults, or by the operation of those general laws which, like the tempest, the blight or the pestilence, are continually falling hard on particular individuals, while others entirely escape, but were occasioned solely by the avarice and injustice of the higher classes of society.

On the contrary, if I firmly believed that by the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, I had no claim of *right* to support, I should, in the first place, feel myself more strongly bound to a life of industry and frugality; but if want, notwithstanding, came upon me, I should consider

sider it in the light of sickness, as an evil incidental to my present state of being, and which, if I could not avoid, it was my duty to bear with fortitude and resignation. I should know from past experience, that the best title I could have to the assistance of the benevolent would be, the not having brought myself into distress by my own idleness or extravagance. What I received would have the best effect on my feelings towards the higher classes. Even if it were much inferior to what I had been accustomed to, it would still, instead of an injury, be an obligation; and conscious that I had no claim of *right*, nothing but the dread of absolute famine, which might overcome all other considerations, could palliate the guilt of resistance.

I cannot help believing that, if the poor in this country were convinced that they had no claim of *right* to support, and yet in scarcities and all cases of urgent distress were liberally relieved, which I think they would be; the bond, which unites the rich with the poor, would be drawn much closer than at present; and the lower classes of society, as they would have less real reason for irritation and discontent, would be much less subject to these uneasy sensations.

Among those who have objected to my declaration, that the poor have no claim of *right* to

to support, is Mr. Young, who, with a harshness not quite becoming a candid inquirer after truth, has called my proposal for the gradual abolition of the poor-laws a horrible plan, and asserted that the execution of it would be a most iniquitous proceeding. Let this plan however be compared for a moment with that which he himself and others have proposed, of fixing the sum of the poor's rates, which on no account is to be increased. Under such a law, if the distresses of the poor were to be aggravated tenfold, either by the increase of numbers or the recurrence of a scarcity, the same sum would invariably be appropriated to their relief. If the statute which gives the poor a right to support were to remain unexpunged, we should add to the cruelty of starving them the injustice of still *professing* to relieve them. If this statute were expunged or altered, we should virtually deny the right of the poor to support, and only retain the absurdity of saying, that they had a right to a certain sum; an absurdity on which Mr. Young justly comments with much severity in the case of France[a]. In both cases

[a] The National Assembly of France, though they disapproved of the English poor-laws, still adopted their principle, and declared, that the poor had a right to pecuniary assistance; that the Assembly ought to consider

cases the hardships which they would suffer would be much more severe, and would come upon them in a much more unprepared state, than upon the plan proposed in the Essay.

According to this plan all that are already married, and even all that are engaged to marry during the course of the year, and all their children, would be relieved as usual; and only those who marry subsequently, and who of course may be supposed to have made better provision for contingencies, would be out of the pale of relief.

Any plan for the abolition of the poor-laws must

such a provision as one of its first and most sacred duties; and that, with this view, an expense ought to be incurred to the amount of 50 millions a year. Mr. Young justly observes that he does not comprehend how it is possible to regard the expenditure of 50 millions as a sacred duty, and not extend that 50 to 100 (if necessity should demand it), the 100 to 200, the 200 to 300, and so on in the same miserable progression which has taken place in England. Travels in France, c. xv. p. 439.

I should be the last man to quote Mr. Young against himself, if I thought he had left the path of error for the path of truth, as such kind of inconsistency I hold to be highly praiseworthy. But thinking, on the contrary, that he has left truth for error, it is surely justifiable to remind him of his former opinions. We may recall to a vicious man his former virtuous conduct, though it would be useless and indelicate to remind a virtuous man of the vices which he had relinquished.

must presuppose a general acknowledgment that they are essentially wrong, and that it is necessary to tread back our steps. With this acknowledgment, whatever objections may be made to my plan, in the too frequently short-sighted views of policy, I have no fear of comparing it with any other that has yet been advanced, in point of justice and humanity; and of course the terms iniquitous and horrible "pass by me like the idle wind, which I regard not."

Mr. Young, it would appear, has now given up this plan. He has pleaded for the privilege of being inconsistent, and has given such reasons for it that I am disposed to acquiesce in them, provided he confines the exercise of this privilege to different publications, in the interval between which he may have collected new facts. But I still think it not quite allowable in the same publication: and yet it appears that in the very paper, in which he has so severely condemned my scheme, the same arguments, which he has used to reprobate it, are applicable with equal force against his own proposal, as there explained.

He allows that his plan can provide only for a certain number of families, and has nothing to do with the increase from them*; but in allowing this, he allows that it does not reach

* Annals of Agriculture, No. 239, p. 219.

the grand difficulty attending a provision for the poor. In this most essential point, after reprobating me for saying, that the poor have no claim of *right* to support, he is compelled to adopt the very same conclusion; and to own that " it might be prudent to consider the " misery to which the progressive population " might be subject, when there was not a suf- " ficient demand for them in towns and manu " factures, as an evil which it was absolutely " and physically impossible to prevent." Now the sole reason why I say that the poor have no claim of *right* to support, is the physical impossibility of relieving this progressive population. Mr. Young expressly acknowledges this physical impossibility; yet with an inconsistency scarcely credible still declaims against my declaration.

The power, which the society may possess of relieving a certain portion of the poor, is a consideration perfectly distinct from the general question; and I am quite sure I have never said that it is not our duty to do all the good that is practicable. But this limited power of assisting individuals cannot possibly establish a general right. If the poor have really a natural right to support, and if our present laws be only a confirmation of this right, it ought certainly to extend unimpaired to all who are in distress,

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to the increase from the cottagers as well as to the cottagers themselves: and it would be a palpable injustice in the society, to adopt Mr. Young's plan, and purchase from the present generation the disfranchisement of their posterity.

Mr. Young objects very strongly to that passage of the Essay[a], in which I observe that a man, who plunges himself into poverty and dependence by marrying without any prospect of being able to maintain his family, has more reason to accuse himself than the price of labour, the parish, the avarice of the rich, the institutions of society, and the dispensations of Providence; except as far as he has been deceived by those who ought to have instructed him. In answer to this, Mr. Young says that the poor fellow is justified in every one of these complaints, that of Providence alone excepted; and that, seeing other cottagers living comfortably with three or four acres of land, he has cause to accuse institutions which deny him that which the rich could well spare, and which would give him all he wants[b]. I would beg Mr. Young for a moment to consider how the

[a] Book iv. c. iii. p. 506, 4to. edit. vol. iii. p. 106, of this edition.

[b] Annals of Agriculture, No. 239, p. 226.

matter

matter would stand, if his own plan were completely executed. After all the commons had been divided as he has proposed, if a labourer had more than one son, in what respect would the second or third be in a different situation from the man that I have supposed? Mr. Young cannot possibly mean to say that, if he had the very natural desire of marrying at twenty, he would still have a right to complain that the society did not give him a house and three or four acres of land. He has indeed expressly denied this absurd consequence, though in so doing he has directly contradicted the declaration just quoted*. The progressive population, he says, would, according to his system, be cut off from the influence of the poor-laws, and the encouragement to marry would remain exactly in that proportion less than at present. Under these circumstances, without land, without the prospect of parish relief, and with the price of labour only sufficient to maintain two children, can Mr. Young seriously think that the poor man, if he be really aware of his situation, does not do wrong in marrying, and ought not to accuse himself for following what Mr. Young calls the dictates of God, of nature and of revelation? Mr. Young cannot be un-

* Annals of Agriculture, No. 239, p. 214.

aware

aware of the wretchedness that must inevitably follow a marriage under such circumstances. His plan makes no provision whatever for altering these circumstances. He must therefore totally disregard all the misery arising from excessive poverty; or, if he allows that these supernumerary members must necessarily wait, either till a cottage with land becomes vacant in the country, or that by emigrating to towns they can find the means of providing for a family, all the declamation, which he has urged with such pomp against deferring marriage in my system, would be equally applicable in his own. In fact, if Mr. Young's plan really attained the object, which it professes to have in view, that of bettering the condition of the poor; and did not defeat its intent by encouraging a too rapid multiplication, and consequently lowering the price of labour; it cannot be doubted that not only the supernumerary members just mentioned, but all the labouring poor, must wait longer before they could marry than they do at present.

The following proposition may be said to be capable of mathematical demonstration. In a country, the resources of which will not permanently admit of an increase of population more rapid than the existing rate, no improvement in the condition of the people, which would tend

tend to diminish mortality, could *possibly* take place without being accompanied by a smaller proportion of births, supposing of course no particular increase of emigration[a]. To a person who has considered the subject, there is no proposition in Euclid, which brings home to the mind a stronger conviction than this; and there is no truth so invariably confirmed by all the registers of births, deaths and marriages, that have ever been collected. In this country it has appeared that, according to the returns of the Population Act[b], the proportion of births

[a] With regard to the resources of emigration, I refer the reader to the chapter on that subject in the Essay. Nothing is more easy than to say that three-fourths of the habitable globe are yet unpeopled; but it is by no means so easy to fill these parts with flourishing colonies. The peculiar circumstances which have caused the spirit of emigration in the Highlands, so clearly explained in the able work of Lord Selkirk before referred to, are not of constant recurrence; nor is it by any means to be wished that they should be so. And yet without some such circumstances, people are by no means very ready to leave their native soil, and will bear much distress at home, rather than venture on these distant regions. I am of opinion, that it is both the duty and interest of governments to facilitate emigration; but it would surely be unjust to oblige people to leave their country and kindred against their inclinations.

[b] The Returns of 1801.

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to deaths is about 4 to 3. This proportion with a mortality of 1 in 40 would double the population in 83 years and a half*; and as we cannot suppose that the country could admit of more than a quadrupled population in the next hundred and sixty-six years, we may safely say that its resources will not allow of a permanent rate of increase greater than that which is taking place at present. But if this be granted, it follows as a direct conclusion, that if Mr. Young's plan, or any other, really succeeded in bettering the condition of the poor, and enabling them to rear more of their children, the vacancies in cottages in proportion to the number of expectants would happen slower than at present, and the age of marriage must inevitably be later.

With regard to the expression of later marriages, it should always be recollected that it refers to no particular age, but is entirely comparative. The marriages in England are later than in France, the natural consequence of that prudence and respectability generated by a better government; and can we doubt that good has been the result? The marriages in this country now are later than they were before the revolution; and I feel firmly persuaded,

* Table iii. p. 238, 4to. edit.; and Table ii. p. 168, vol. ii. of this edition.

that

that the increased healthiness observed of late years could not possibly have taken place without this accompanying circumstance. Two or three years in the average age of marriage, by lengthening each generation, and tending, in a small degree, both to diminish the prolifickness of marriages, and the number of born living to be married, may make a considerable difference in the rate of increase, and be adequate to allow for a considerably diminished mortality. But I would on no account talk of any limits whatever. The only plain and intelligible measure with regard to marriage, is the having a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family. If the possession of one of Mr. Young's cottages would give the labourer this prospect, he would be quite right to marry; but if it did not, or if he could only obtain a rented house without land, and the wages of labour were only sufficient to maintain two children, does Mr. Young, who cuts him off from the influence of the poor-laws, presume to say, that he would still be right in marrying*?

* The lowest prospect, with which a man can be justified in marrying, seems to be the power, when in health, of earning such wages as, at the average price of corn, will maintain the average number of living children to a marriage.

Mr. Young

Mr. Young has asserted that I have made perfect chastity in the single state absolutely necessary to the success of my plan; but this surely is a misrepresentation. Perfect virtue is indeed necessary, to enable man to avoid *all* the moral and physical evils which depend upon his own conduct; but who ever expected perfect virtue upon earth? I have said, what I conceive to be strictly true, that it is our duty to defer marriage till we can feed our children; and that it is also our duty not to indulge ourselves in vicious gratifications; but I have never said that I expected either, much less both, of these duties to be completely fulfilled. In this, and a number of other cases, it may happen that the violation of one of two duties will enable a man to perform the other with greater facility; but if they be really both duties, and both practicable, no power *on earth* can absolve a man from the guilt of violating either. This can only be done by that God, who can weigh the crime against the temptation, and will temper justice with mercy. The moralist is still bound to inculcate the practice of both duties; and each individual must be left to act under the temptations to which he is exposed, as his conscience shall dictate. Whatever I may have said in drawing a picture *professedly* visionary, for the sake of illustration;

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in the practical application of my principles I have taken man as he is, with all his imperfections on his head. And thus viewing him, and knowing that some checks to population must exist, I have not the slighest hesitation in saying, that the prudential check to marriage is better than premature mortality. And in this decision I feel myself completely justified by experience.

In every instance that can be traced, in which an improved government has given to its subjects a greater degree of foresight, industry and personal dignity, these effects, under similar circumstances of increase, have invariably been accompanied by a diminished proportion of marriages. This is a proof that an increase of moral worth in the general character is not at least *incompatible* with an increase of temptations with respect to one particular vice; and the instances of Norway, Switzerland, England and Scotland, adduced in the last chapter of the Essay, shew that, in comparing different countries together, a smaller proportion of marriages and births does not necessarily imply the greater prevalence even of this particular vice. This is surely quite enough for the legislator. He cannot estimate with tolerable accuracy the degree in which chastity in the single state prevails. His general conclusions must

must be founded on general results, and these are clearly in his favour.

To much of Mr. Young's plan, as he has at present explained it, I should by no means object. The peculiar evil which I apprehended from it, that of taking the poor from the consumption of wheat, and feeding them on milk and potatoes, might certainly be avoided by a limitation of the number of cottages; and I entirely agree with him in thinking, that we should not be deterred from making 500,000 families more comfortable, because we cannot extend the same relief to all the rest. I have indeed myself ventured to recommend a general improvement of cottages, and even the cow system on a limited scale; and perhaps with proper precautions a certain portion of land might be given to a considerable body of the labouring classes.

If the law which entitles the poor to support were to be repealed, I should most highly approve of any plan which would tend to render such repeal more palatable on its first promulgation: and in this view, some kind of compact with the poor might be very desirable. A plan of letting land to labourers under certain conditions has lately been tried in the parish of Long Newnton in Gloucestershire; and the result, with a general proposal founded on it, has

has been submitted to the public by Mr. Estcourt. The present success has been very striking; but in this, and every other case of the kind, we should always bear in mind, that no experiment respecting a provision for the poor can be said to be complete till succeeding generations have arisen*. I doubt if ever there has been an instance of any thing like a liberal institution for the poor, which did not succeed on its first establishment, however it might have failed afterwards. But this consideration should by no means deter us from making such experiments, when present good is to be obtained by them, and a future overbalance of evil is not justly to be apprehended. It should only make us less rash in drawing our inferences.

With regard to the general question of the advantages to the lower classes of possessing land, it should be recollected that such pos-

* In any plan, particularly of a distribution of land, as a compensation for the relief given by the poor-laws, the succeeding generations would form the grand difficulty. All others would be perfectly trivial in comparison. For a time every thing might go on very smoothly, and the rates be much diminished; but afterwards, they would either increase again as rapidly as before, or the scheme would be exposed to all the same objections which have been made to mine, without the same justice and consistency to palliate them.

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sessions are by no means a novelty. Formerly this system prevailed in almost every country with which we are acquainted, and prevails at present in many countries, where the peasants are far from being remarkable for their comforts, but are, on the contrary, very poor, and particularly subject to scarcities. With respect to this latter evil, indeed, it is quite obvious that a peasantry which depends principally on its possessions in land, must be more exposed to it than one which depends on the general wages of labour. When a year of deficient crops occurs in a country of any extent and diversity of soil, it is always partial, and some districts are more affected than others. But when a bad crop of grass, corn or potatoes, or a mortality among cattle, falls on a poor man whose principal dependence is on two or three acres of land, he is in the most deplorable and helpless situation. He is comparatively without money to purchase supplies, and is not for a moment to be compared with the man, who depends on the wages of labour, and who will of course be able to purchase that portion of the general crop, whatever it may be, to which his relative situation in the society entitles him. In Sweden, where the farmers' labourers are paid principally in land, and often keep two or three cows, it is not uncommon for the peasants

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of one district to be almost starving, while their neighbours at a little distance are living in comparative plenty. It will be found indeed generally, that, in almost all the countries which are particularly subject to scarcities and famines, either the farms are very small, or the labourers are paid principally in land. China, Indostan, and the former state of the Highlands of Scotland, furnish some proofs among many others of the truth of this observation; and in reference to the small properties of France, Mr. Young himself in his Tour particularly notices the distress arising from the least failure of the crops; and observes that such a deficiency, as in England passes almost without notice, in France is attended with dreadful calamities *.

Should any plan therefore of assisting the poor by land be adopted in this country, it would be absolutely essential to its ultimate success, to prevent them from making it their principal dependence. And this might probably be done by attending strictly to the two following rules. Not to let the division of land be so great as to interrupt the cottager essen-

* Travels in France, vol. i. c. xii. p. 409. That country will probably be the least liable to scarcities, in which agriculture is carried on as the most flourishing *manufacture* of the state.

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tially in his usual labours; and always to stop in the further distribution of land and cottages, when the price of labour, independently of any assistance from land, would not at the average price of corn maintain three, or at least two children. Could the matter be so ordered, that the labourer in working for others should still continue to earn the same real command over the necessaries of life that he did before, a very great accession of comfort and happiness might accrue to the poor from the possession of land, without any evil that I can foresee at present. But if these points were not attended to, I should certainly fear an approximation to the state of the poor in France, Sweden and Ireland; nor do I think that any of the partial experiments that have yet taken place afford the slightest presumption to the contrary. The result of these experiments is indeed exactly such as one should have expected. Who could ever have doubted that, if without lowering the price of labour, or taking the labourer off from his usual occupations, you could give him the produce of one or two acres of land and the benefit of a cow, you would decidedly raise his condition? But it by no means follows that he would retain this advantage, if the system were so extended, as to make the land his principal dependence, to lower the price of labour, and,

in the language of Mr. Young, to take the poor from the consumption of wheat and feed them on milk and potatoes. It does not appear to me so marvellous, as it does to Mr. Young, that the very same system, which in Lincolnshire and Rutlandshire may produce now the most comfortable peasantry in the British dominions, should in the end, if extended without proper precautions, assimilate the condition of the labourers of this country to that of the lower classes of the Irish.

It is generally dangerous and impolitic in a government to take upon itself to regulate the supply of any commodity in request; and probably the supply of labourers forms no exception to the general rule. I would on no account therefore propose a positive law to regulate their increase; but as any assistance which the society might give them cannot, in the nature of things, be unlimited, the line may fairly be drawn where we please; and with regard to the increase from this point, every thing would be left as before to individual exertion and individual speculation.

If any plan of this kind were adopted by the government, I cannot help thinking that it might be made the means of giving the best kind of encouragement and reward to those who are employed in our defence. If the period

riod of enlisting were only for a limited time, and at the expiration of that time every person who had conducted himself well were entitled to a house and a small portion of land, if a country labourer, and to a tenement in a town and a small pension, if an artificer (all inalienable), a very strong motive would be held out to young men, not only to enter into the service of their country, but to behave well in that service; and in a short time, there would be such a martial population at home as the unfortunate state of Europe seems in a most peculiar manner to require. As it is only limited assistance that the society can possibly give, it seems in every respect fair and proper that, in regulating this limit, some important end should be attained.

If the poor-laws be allowed to remain exactly in their present state, we ought at least to be aware to what cause it is owing, that their effects have not been more pernicious than they are observed to be; that we may not complain of, or alter those parts, without which we should really not have the power of continuing them. The law which obliges each parish to maintain its own poor is open to many objections. It keeps the overseers and churchwardens continually on the watch to prevent new comers, and constantly in a state of dis-

pute with other parishes. It thus prevents the free circulation of labour from place to place, and renders its price very unequal in different parts of the kingdom. It disposes all landlords rather to pull down than to build cottages on their estates; and this scarcity of habitations in the country, by driving more to the towns than would otherwise have gone, gives a relative discouragement to agriculture, and a relative encouragement to manufactures. These, it must be allowed, are no inconsiderable evils; but if the cause which occasions them were removed, evils of much greater magnitude would follow. I agree with Mr. Young in thinking, that there is scarcely a parish in the kingdom, where, if more cottages were built, and let at any tolerably moderate rents, they would not be immediately filled with new couples. I even agree with him in thinking that in some places this want of habitations operates too strongly in preventing marriage. But I have not the least doubt that, considered generally, its operation in the present state of things is most beneficial; and that it is almost exclusively owing to this cause that we have been able so long to continue the poor-laws. If any man could build a hovel by the road-side, or on the neighbouring waste, without molestation; and yet were secure that he and his family would always

ways be supplied with work and food by the parish, if they were not readily to be obtained elsewhere; I do not believe that it would be long before the physical impossibility of executing the letter of the poor-laws would appear. It is of importance therefore to be aware that it is not because this or any other society has really the power of employing and supporting all that might be born, that we have been able to continue the present system; but because by the indirect operation of this system, not adverted to at the time of its establishment and frequently reprobated since, the number of births is always very greatly limited, and thus reduced within the pale of possible support.

The obvious tendency of the poor-laws is certainly to encourage marriage; but a closer attention to all their indirect as well as direct effects may make it a matter of doubt to what extent they really do this. They clearly tend, in their general operation, to discourage sobriety and economy, to encourage idleness and the desertion of children, and to put virtue and vice more on a level than they otherwise would be; but I will not presume to say positively that they greatly encourage population. It is certain that the proportion of births in this country compared with others in similar circumstances

cumstances is very small; but this was to be expected from the superiority of the government, the more respectable state of the people, and the more general diffusion of a taste for cleanliness and conveniences. And it will readily occur to the reader, that owing to these causes, combined with the twofold operation of the poor-laws, it must be extremely difficult to ascertain, with any degree of precision, what has been their effect on population*.

The only argument of a general nature against the Essay, which strikes me as having any considerable force, is the following. It is against the application of its principles, not the principles themselves, and has not, that I know of, been yet advanced in its present form. It may be said that, according to my own reasonings

* The most favourable light, in which the poor-laws can posibly be placed, is to say that under all the circumstances, with which they have been accompanied, they do not much encourage marriage; and undoubtedly the returns of the Population Act seem to warrant the assertion. Should this be true, many of the objections which have been urged in the Essay against the poor-laws will be removed; but I wish to press on the attention of the reader, that they will in that case be removed in strict conformity to the general principles of the work, and in a manner to confirm, not to invalidate, the main positions which it has attempted to establish.

and

and the facts stated in my work, it appears that the diminished proportion of births, which I consider as absolutely necessary to the permanent improvement of the condition of the poor, invariably follows an improved government, and the greater degree of personal respectability which it gives to the lower classes of society. Consequently allowing the desirableness of the end, it is not necessary, in order to obtain it, to risk the promulgation of any new opinions which may alarm the prejudices of the poor, and the effect of which we cannot with certainty foresee; but we have only to proceed in improving our civil polity, conferring the benefits of education upon all, and removing every obstacle to the general extension of all those privileges and advantages which may be enjoyed in common; and we may be quite sure that the effect, to which I look forward, and which can alone render these advantages permanent, will follow.

I acknowledge the truth and force of this argument, and have only to observe, in answer to it, that it is difficult to conceive, that we should not proceed with more celerity and certainty towards the end in view, if the principal causes, which tend to promote or retard it, were generally known. In particular, I cannot help looking forward to a very decided improvement

improvement in the habits and temper of the lower classes, when their real situation has been clearly explained to them; and if this were done gradually and cautiously, and accompanied with proper moral and religious instructions, I should not expect any danger from it. I am always unwilling to believe, that the general dissemination of truth is prejudicial. Cases of the kind are undoubtedly conceivable; but they should be admitted with very great caution. If the general presumption in favour of the advantage of truth were once essentially shaken, all ardour in its cause would share the same fate; and the interests of knowledge and virtue most decidedly suffer. It is besides a species of arrogance not lightly to be encouraged, for any man to suppose that he has penetrated further into the laws of nature than the great Author of them intended, further than is consistent with the good of mankind.

Under these impressions I have freely given my opinions to the public. In the truth of the general principles of the Essay I confess that I feel such a confidence, that, till something has been advanced against them very different indeed from any thing that has hitherto appeared, I cannot help considering them as incontrovertible. With regard to the application of these principles, the case is certainly different; and

and as dangers of opposite kinds are to be guarded against, the subject will of course admit of much latitude of opinion. At all events, however, it must be allowed that, whatever may be our determination respecting the advantages or disadvantages of endeavouring to circulate the truths on this subject among the poor, it must be highly advantageous that they should be known to all those who have it in their power to influence the laws and institutions of society. That the body of an army should not in all cases know the particulars of their situation may possibly be desirable; but that the leaders should be in the same state of ignorance will hardly, I think, be contended.

If it be really true, that without a diminished proportion of births[a] we cannot attain any *permanent* improvement in the health and happiness of the mass of the people, and cannot secure that description of population, which, by containing a larger share of adults, is best calculated to create fresh resources, and consequently to encourage a continued increase of

[a] It should always be recollected that a diminished *proportion* of births may take place under a constant annual increase of the absolute number. This is in fact exactly what has happened in England and Scotland during the last forty years.

efficient

efficient population; it is surely of the highest importance that this should be known, that, if we take no steps directly to promote this effect, we should not under the influence of the former prejudices on this subject, endeavour to counteract it*. And if it be thought unadviseable

* We should be aware that a scarcity of men, owing either to great losses, or to some particular and unusual demand, is liable to happen in every country; and in no respect invalidates the general principle that has been advanced. Whatever may be the tendency to increase, it is quite clear that an extraordinary supply of men cannot be produced either in six months, or six years; but even with a view to a more than usual supply, causes which tend to diminish mortality are not only more certain but more rapid in their effects, than direct encouragements to marriage. An increase of births may, and often does, take place, without the ultimate accomplishment of our object; but supposing the births to remain the same, it is impossible for a diminished mortality not to be accompanied by an increase of effective population.

We are very apt to be deceived on this subject by the almost constant demand for labour, which prevails in every prosperous country; but we should consider that in countries which can but just keep up their population, as the price of labour must be sufficient to rear a family of a certain number, a single man will have a superfluity, and labour would be in constant demand at the price of the subsistence of an individual. It cannot be doubted that in this country we could soon employ double the

unadviseable to abolish the poor-laws, it cannot be doubted, that a knowledge of those general principles, which render them inefficient in their humane intentions, might be applied so far to modify them and regulate their execution, as to remove many of the evils with which they are accompanied, and make them less objectionable.

There is only one subject more which I shall notice, and that is rather a matter of feeling than of argument. Many persons, whose understandings are not so constituted that they

the number of labourers, if we could have them at our own price; because supply will produce demand, as well as demand supply. The present great extension of the cotton trade did not originate in an extraordinary increase of demand at the former prices, but in an increased supply at a much cheaper rate, which of course immediately produced an extended demand. As we cannot however obtain men at sixpence a day by improvements in machinery, we must submit to the necessary conditions of their rearing; and there is no man, who has the slighest feeling for the happiness of the most numerous class of society, or has even just views of policy on the subject, who would not rather choose that the requisite population should be obtained by such a price of labour, combined with such habits, as would occasion a very small mortality, than from a great proportion of births, of which comparatively few would reach manhood.

can

can regulate their belief or disbelief by their likes or dislikes, have professed their perfect conviction of the truth of the general principles contained in the Essay; but at the same time have lamented this conviction, as throwing a darker shade over our views of human nature, and tending particularly to narrow our prospects of future improvement. In these feelings I cannot agree with them. If, from a review of the past, I could not only believe that a fundamental and very extraordinary improvement in human society was possible, but feel a firm confidence that it would take place, I should undoubtedly be grieved to find, that I had overlooked some cause, the operation of which would at once blast my hopes. But if the contemplation of the past history of mankind, from which alone we can judge of the future, renders it almost impossible to feel such a confidence, I confess that I had much rather believe that some real and deeply-seated difficulty existed, the constant struggle with which was calculated to rouse the natural inactivity of man, to call forth his faculties, and invigorate and improve his mind; a species of difficulty, which it must be allowed is most eminently and peculiarly suited to a state of probation; than that nearly all the evils of life might with the most perfect facility be removed, but for the perverseness

verseness and wickedness of those who influence human institutions *.

A person who held this latter opinion must necessarily live in a constant state of irritation and disappointment. The ardent expectations, with which he might begin life, would soon receive the most cruel check. The regular progress of society, under the most favourable circumstances, would to him appear slow and unsatisfactory; but instead even of this regular progress, his eye would be more frequently presented with retrograde movements, and the most disheartening reverses. The changes, to which he had looked forward with delight, would be found big with new and unlooked-for evils; and the characters, on which he had reposed the most confidence, would be seen frequently deserting his favourite cause, either from the lessons of experience or the tempta-

* The misery and vice arising from the pressure of the population too hard against the limits of subsistence, and the misery and vice arising from promiscuous intercourse, may be considered as the Scylla and Charybdis of human life. That it is possible for each individual to steer clear of both these rocks is certainly true, and a truth which I have endeavoured strongly to maintain; but that these rocks do not form a difficulty independent of human institutions, no person with any knowledge of the subject can venture to assert.

tion of power. In this state of constant disappointment, he would be but too apt to attribute every thing to the worst motives; he would be inclined to give up the cause of improvement in despair; and judging of the whole from a part, nothing but a peculiar goodness of heart and amiableness of disposition could preserve him from that sickly and disgusting misanthropy, which is but too frequently the end of such characters.

On the contrary, a person who held the other opinion, as he would set out with more moderate expectations, would of course be less liable to disappointment. A comparison of the best with the worst states of society, and the obvious inference from analogy, that the best were capable of further improvement, would constantly present to his mind a prospect sufficiently animating to warrant his most persevering exertions. But aware of the difficulties with which the subject was surrounded, knowing how often in the attempt to attain one object some other had been lost, and that, though society had made rapid advances in some directions, it had been comparatively stationary in others, he would be constantly prepared for failures. These failures, instead of creating despair, would only create knowledge; instead of checking his ardour, would give it a wiser and

and more successful direction; and, having founded his opinion of mankind on broad and general grounds, the disappointment of any particular views would not change this opinion; but even in declining age he would probably be found believing as firmly in the reality and general prevalence of virtue as in the existence and frequency of vice; and to the last, looking forward with a just confidence to those improvements in society, which the history of the past, in spite of all the reverses with which it is accompanied, seems clearly to warrant.

It may be true that, if ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise; but if ignorance be not bliss, as in the present instance; if all false views of society must not only impede decidedly the progress of improvement, but necessarily terminate in the most bitter disappointments to the individuals who form them; I shall always think that the feelings and prospects of those, who make the justest estimates of our future expectations, are the most consolatory; and that the characters of this description are happier themselves, at the same time that they are beyond comparison more likely to contribute to the improvement and happiness of society[a].

[a] While the last sheet of this Appendix was printing (1807), I heard with some surprise, that an argument had been

been drawn from the Principle of Population in favour of the slave-trade. As the just conclusion from that principle appears to me to be exactly the contrary, I cannot help saying a few words on the subject.

If the only argument against the slave-trade had been, that, from the mortality it occasioned, it was likely to unpeople Africa, or extinguish the human race, some comfort with regard to these fears might, indeed, be drawn from the Principle of Population; but as the necessity of the abolition has never, that I know of, been urged on the ground of these apprehensions, a reference to the laws which regulate the increase of the human species was certainly most unwise in the friends of the slave-trade.

The abolition of the slave-trade is defended principally by the two following arguments:—

1st. That the trade to the coast of Africa for slaves, together with their subsequent treatment in the West Indies, is productive of so much human misery, that its continuance is disgraceful to us as men and as Christians.

2d. That the culture of the West-India islands could go on with equal advantage and much greater security, if no further importation of slaves were to take place.

With regard to the first argument, it appears, in the Essay on the Principle of Population, that so great is the tendency of mankind to increase, that nothing but some physical or moral check, operating in an *excessive* and *unusual* degree, can permanently keep the population of a country below the average means of subsistence. In the West-India islands a constant recruit of labouring negroes is necessary; and consequently the immediate checks to population must operate with *excessive* and

unusual

unusual force. All the checks to population were found resolvable into moral restraint, vice and misery. In a state of slavery moral restraint cannot have much influence; nor in any state will it ever continue permanently to diminish the population. The whole effect, therefore, is to be attributed to the *excessive* and *unusual* action of vice and misery; and a reference to the facts contained in the Essay incontrovertibly proves that the condition of the slaves in the West Indies, taken altogether, is most wretched, and that the representations of the friends of the abolition cannot easily have been exaggerated.

It will be said that the principal reason, why the slaves in the West Indies constantly diminish, is, that the sexes are not in equal numbers, a considerable majority of males being always imported; but this very circumstance decides at once on the cruelty of their situation, and must necessarily be one powerful cause of their degraded moral condition.

It may be said also, that many towns do not keep up their numbers, and yet that the same objection is not made to them on that account. But the cases will admit of no comparison. If, for the sake of better society or higher wages, people are willing to expose themselves to a less pure air and greater temptations to vice, no hardship is suffered that can reasonably be complained of. The superior mortality of towns falls principally upon children, and is scarcely noticed by people of mature age. The sexes are in equal numbers; and every man, after a few years of industry, may look forward to the happiness of domestic life. If during the time that he is thus waiting, he acquires vicious habits which indispose him to marriage, he has nobody to blame except himself. But

with the negroes the case is totally different. The unequal number of the sexes shuts out at once the majority of them from all chance of domestic happiness. They have no hope of this kind to sweeten their toils and animate their exertions; but are necessarily condemned either to unceasing privation or to the most vicious excesses; and thus shut out from every cheering prospect, we cannot be surprised that they are in general ready to welcome that death, which so many meet with in the prime of life.

The second argument is no less powerfully supported by the Principle of Population than the first. It appears, from a very general survey of different countries, that, under every form of government, however unjust and tyrannical, in every climate of the known world, however apparently unfavourable to health, it has been found that population, almost with the sole exception above alluded to, has been able to keep itself up to the level of the means of subsistence. Consequently, if by the abolition of the trade to Africa the slaves in the West Indies were placed only in a *tolerable* situation, if their civil condition and moral habits were only made to *approach* to those which prevail among the mass of the human race in the worst-governed countries of the world, it is contrary to the general laws of nature to suppose that they would not be able by procreation fully to supply the effective demand for labour; and it is difficult to conceive that a population so raised would not be in every point of view preferable to that which exists at present.

It is perfectly clear therefore, that a consideration of the laws which govern the increase and decrease of the human species, tends to strengthen, in the most powerful manner, all the arguments in favour of the abolition.

With

With regard to the state of society among the African nations, it will readily occur to the reader that, in describing it, the question of the slave-trade was foreign to my purpose; and I might naturally fear that, if I entered upon it, I should be led into too long a digression. But certainly all the facts which I have mentioned, and which are taken principally from Park, if they do not absolutely *prove* that the wars in Africa are excited and aggravated by the traffic on the coast, tend powerfully to *confirm the supposition*. The state of Africa, as I have described it, is exactly such as we should expect in a country, where the capture of men was considered as a more advantageous employment than agriculture or manufactures. Of the state of these nations some hundred years ago, it must be confessed, we have little knowledge that we can depend upon. But allowing that the regular plundering excursions, which Park describes, are of the most ancient date; yet it is impossible to suppose that any circumstance which, like the European traffic, must give additional value to the plunder thus acquired, would not powerfully aggravate them, and effectually prevent all progress towards a happier order of things. As long as the nations of Europe continue barbarous enough to purchase slaves in Africa, we may be quite sure that Africa will continue barbarous enough to supply them.

1817.

SINCE the publication of the last edition of this Essay in 1807, two Works have appeared, the avowed objects of which are directly to oppose its principles and conclusions. These are *the Principles of Population and Production*, by Mr. Weyland; and *an Inquiry into the Principle of Population*, by Mr. James Grahame.

I would willingly leave the question as it at present stands to the judgment of the public, without any attempt on my part to influence it further by a more particular reply; but as I professed my readiness to enter into the discussion of any serious objections to my principles and conclusions, which were brought forward in a spirit of candour and truth; and as one at least of the publications above mentioned may be so characterized, and the other is by no means deficient in personal respect; I am induced shortly to notice them.

I should not however have thought it necessary to advert to Mr. Grahame's publication, which is a slight work without any very distinct object in view, if it did not afford some strange specimens

specimens of misrepresentation, which it may be useful to point out.

Mr. Grahame in his second chapter, speaking of the tendency exhibited by the law of human increase to a redundance of population, observes, that some philosophers have considered this tendency as a mark of the foresight of nature, which has thus provided a ready supply for the waste of life occasioned by human vices and passions; while "others, of whom Mr. Malthus "is the leader, regard the vices and follies of "human nature, and their various products, "famine, disease and war, as *benevolent re-* "*medies* by which nature has enabled human "beings to correct the disorders that would "arise from that redundance of population "which the unrestrained operation of her laws "would create*."

These are the opinions imputed to me and the philosophers with whom I am associated. If the imputation were just, we have certainly on many accounts great reason to be ashamed of ourselves. For what are we made to say? In the first place, we are stated to assert that *famine* is a benevolent remedy for *want of food*, as redundance of population admits of no other interpretation than that of a people ill supplied with the means of subsistence, and consequently

* P. 100.

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the benevolent remedy of famine here noticed can only apply to the disorders arising from scarcity of food.

Secondly; we are said to affirm that nature enables human beings by means of diseases to correct the disorders that would arise from a redundance of population;—that is, that mankind willingly and purposely create diseases, with a view to prevent those diseases which are the necessary consequence of a redundant population, and are not worse or more mortal than the means of prevention.

And thirdly, it is imputed to us generally, that we consider the vices and follies of mankind as benevolent remedies for the disorders arising from a redundant population; and it follows as a matter of course that these vices ought to be encouraged rather than reprobated.

It would not be easy to compress in so small a compass a greater quantity of absurdity, inconsistency, and unfounded assertion.

The two first imputations may perhaps be peculiar to Mr. Grahame; and protection from them may be found in their gross absurdity and inconsistency. With regard to the third, it must be allowed that it has not the merit of novelty. Although it is scarcely less absurd than the two others, and has been shewn to be an opinion no where to be found in the Essay, nor legitimately to

to be inferred from any part of it, it has been continually repeated in various quarters for fourteen years, and now appears in the pages of Mr. Grahame. For the last time I will now notice it; and should it still continue to be brought forward, I think I may be fairly excused from paying the slightest further attention either to the imputation itself, or to those who advance it.

If I had merely stated that the tendency of the human race to increase faster than the means of subsistence, was kept to a level with these means by some or other of the forms of vice and misery, and that these evils were absolutely unavoidable, and incapable of being diminished by any human efforts; still I could not with any semblance of justice be accused of considering vice and misery as the remedies of these evils, instead of the very evils themselves. As well nearly might I be open to Mr. Grahame's imputations of considering the famine and disease necessarily arising from a scarcity of food as a benevolent remedy for the evils which this scarcity occasions.

But I have not so stated the proposition. I have not considered the evils of vice and misery arising from a redundant population as unavoidable, and incapable of being diminished. On the contrary I have pointed out a mode by which these evils may be removed or mitigated by removing or mitigating their cause. I have endeavoured

deavoured to shew that this may be done consistently with human virtue and happiness. I have never considered any possible increase of population as an evil, except as far as it might increase the proportion of vice and misery. Vice and misery, and these alone, are the evils which it has been my great object to contend against. I have expressly proposed moral restraint as their rational and proper remedy; and whether the remedy be good or bad, adequate or inadequate, the proposal itself, and the stress which I have laid upon it, is an incontrovertible proof that I never can have considered vice and misery as themselves remedies.

But not only does the general tenour of my work, and the specific object of the latter part of it, clearly shew that I do not consider vice and misery as remedies; but particular passages in various parts of it are so distinct on the subject, as not to admit of being misunderstood but by the most perverse blindness.

It is therefore quite inconceivable that any writer with the slightest pretension to respectability should venture to bring forward such imputations; and it must be allowed to shew either such a degree of ignorance, or such a total want of candour, as utterly to disqualify him for the discussion of such subjects.

But Mr. Grahame's misrepresentations are not

not confined to the passage above referred to. In his Introduction he observes that, in order to check a redundant population, the evils of which I consider as much nearer than Mr. Wallace, I "recommend immediate recourse to human efforts, to the restraints prescribed by Condorcet, for the correction or mitigation of the evil *." This is an assertion entirely without foundation. I have never adverted to the check suggested by Condorcet without the most marked disapprobation. Indeed I should always particularly reprobate any artificial and unnatural modes of checking population, both on account of their immorality and their tendency to remove a necessary stimulus to industry. If it were possible for each married couple to limit by a wish the number of their children, there is certainly reason to fear that the indolence of the human race would be very greatly increased; and that neither the population of individual countries, nor of the whole earth, would ever reach its natural and proper extent. But the restraints which I have recommended are quite of a different character. They are not only pointed out by reason and sanctioned by religion, but tend in the most marked manner to stimulate industry. It is not easy to conceive a more powerful en-

* P. 18.

couragement

couragement to exertion and good conduct than the looking forward to marriage as a state peculiarly desirable; but only to be enjoyed in comfort, by the acquisition of habits of industry, economy and prudence. And it is in this light that I have always wished to place it *.

In speaking of the poor-laws in this country, and of their tendency (particularly as they have been lately administered) to eradicate all remaining spirit of independence among our peasantry, I observe that, "hard as it may appear "in individual instances, dependent poverty "ought to be held disgraceful;" by which of course I only mean that such a proper degree of pride as will induce a labouring man to make great exertions, as in Scotland, in order to prevent himself or his nearest relations from falling upon the parish, is very desirable, with a view to the happiness of the lower classes of society. The interpretation which Mr. Grahame gives to this passage is, that the rich "are "so to imbitter the pressure of indigence by "the stings of contumely, that men may be "driven by their pride to prefer even the re-"fuge of despair to the condition of depend-

* See vol. ii., p. 241, of 4th. edit.; p. 493 of the quarto edit.; and vol. iii., p. 82, of the present edit.

"ence!!

" ence [a]!!"—a curious specimen of misrepresentation and exaggeration.

I have written a chapter expressly on the practical direction of our charity; and in detached passages elsewhere have paid a just tribute to the exalted virtue of benevolence. To those who have read these parts of my work, and have attended to the general tone and spirit of the whole, I willingly appeal, if they are but tolerably candid, against these charges of Mr. Grahame, which intimate that I would root out the virtues of charity and benevolence, without regard to the exaltation which they bestow on the moral dignity of our nature; and that in my view the "rich are required only to harden their hearts against calamity, and to prevent the charitable visitings of their nature from keeping alive in them that virtue which is often the only moral link between them and their fellow-mortals [b]." It is not indeed easy to suppose that Mr. Grahame can have read the chapter to which I allude, as both the letter and spirit of it contradict, in the most express and remarkable manner, the imputations conveyed in the above passages.

These are a few specimens of Mr. Grahame's

[a] P. 236. [b] Ibid.

misrepresentations,

misrepresentations, which might easily be multiplied; but on this subject I will only further remark that it shews no inconsiderable want of candour to continue attacking and dwelling upon passages, which have ceased to form a part of the work controverted. And this Mr. Grahame has done in more instances than one, although he could hardly fail to know that he was combating expressions and passages which I have seen reason to alter or expunge.

I really should not have thought it worth while to notice these misrepresentations of Mr. Grahame, if, in spite of them, the style and tone of his publication had not appeared to me to be entitled to more respect than most of my opponents.

With regard to the substance and aim of Mr. Grahame's work, it seems to be intended to shew that emigration is the remedy provided by nature for a redundant population; and that if this remedy cannot be adequately applied, there is no other that can be proposed, which will not lead to consequences worse than the evil itself. These are two points which I have considered at length in the Essay; and it cannot be necessary to repeat any of the arguments here. Emigration, if it could be freely used, has been shewn to be a resource, which could not be of long duration. It cannot therefore under

under any circumstances be considered as an adequate remedy. The latter position is a matter of opinion, and may rationally be held by any person who sees reason to think it well founded. It appears to me, I confess, that experience most decidedly contradicts it; but to those who think otherwise, there is nothing more to be said, thanthat they are bound in consistency to acquiesce in the necessary consequences of their opinion. These consequences are, that the poverty and wretchedness arising from a redundant population, or, in other words, from very low wages and want of employment, are absolutely irremediable, and must be continually increasing as the population of the earth proceeds; and that all the efforts of legislative wisdom and private charity, though they may afford a wholesome and beneficial exercise of human virtue, and may occasionally alter the distribution and vary the pressure of human misery, can do absolutely nothing towards diminishing the general amount or checking the increasing weight of this pressure.

Mr. Weyland's work is of a much more elaborate description than that of Mr. Grahame. It has also a very definite object in view: and although, when he enters into the details of his subject, he is compelled entirely to agree with me

me respecting the checks which practically keep down population to the level of the means of subsistence, and has not in fact given a single reason for the slow progress of population, in the advanced stages of society, that does not clearly and incontrovertibly come under the heads of moral restraint, vice or misery; yet it must be allowed that he sets out with a bold and distinct denial of my premises, and finishes, as he ought to do from such a beginning, by drawing the most opposite conclusions.

After stating fairly my main propositions, and adverting to the conclusion which I have drawn from them, Mr. Weyland says, "Granting the premises, it is indeed obvious that this conclusion is undeniable*."

I desire no other concession than this; and if my premises can be shewn to rest on unsolid foundations, I will most readily give up the inferences I have drawn from them.

To determine the point here at issue it cannot be necessary for me to repeat the proofs of these premises derived both from theory and experience, which have already so fully been brought forwards. It has been allowed that they have been stated with tolerable clearness; and it is known that many persons have con-

* Principles of Population and Production, p. 15.

sidered

sidered them as unassailable, who still refuse to admit the consequences to which they appear to lead. All that can be required therefore on the present occasion is to examine the validity of the objections to these premises brought forward by Mr. Weyland.

Mr. Weyland observes, "that the origin of "what are conceived to be the mistakes and "false reasonings, with respect to the principle "of population, appears to be the assumption "of a tendency to increase in the human spe- "cies, the quickest that can be proved pos- "sible in any particular state of society, as "that which is natural and theoretically possi- "ble in all; and the characterizing of every "cause which tends to prevent such quickest "possible rate as checks to the natural and "spontaneous tendency of population to in- "crease; but as checks evidently insufficient "to stem the progress of an overwhelming "torrent. This seems as eligible a mode of "reasoning, as if one were to assume the height "of the Irish giant as the natural standard of "the stature of man, and to call every reason, "which may be suggested as likely to pre- "vent the generality of men from reaching "it, checks to their growth[a]."

[a] P. 17.

Mr. Weyland

Mr. Weyland has here most unhappily chosen his illustration, as it is in no respect applicable to the case. In order to illustrate the different rates at which population increases in different countries, by the different heights of men, the following comparison and inference would be much more to the purpose.

If in a particular country we observed that all the people had weights of different sizes upon their heads, and that invariably each individual was tall or short in proportion to the smallness or greatness of the pressure upon him; that every person was observed to grow when the weight he carried was either removed or diminished, and that the few among the whole people, whowere exempted from this burden, were very decidedly taller than the rest; would it not be quite justifiable to infer, that the weights which the people carried were the cause of their being in general so short; and that the height of those without weights might fairly be considered as the standard to which it might be expected that the great mass would arrive, if their growth were unrestricted?

For what is it in fact, which we really observe with regard to the different rates of increase in different countries? Do we not see that, in almost every state to which we can direct our attention, the natural tendency to increase is repressed

repressed by the difficulty which the mass of the people find in procuring an ample portion of the necessaries of life, which shews itself more immediately in some or other of the forms of moral restraint, vice and misery? Do we not see that invariably the rates of increase are fast or slow, according as the pressure of these checks is light or heavy; and that in consequence Spain increases at one rate, France at another, England at a third, Ireland at a fourth, parts of Russia at a fifth, parts of Spanish America at a sixth, and the United States of North America at a seventh? Do we not see that, whenever the resources of any country increase, so as to create a great demand for labour and give the lower classes of society a greater command over the necessaries of life, the population of such country, though it might before have been stationary or proceeding very slowly, begins immediately to make a start forwards? And do we not see that in those few countries or districts of countries, where the pressure arising from the difficulty of procuring the necessaries and conveniencies of life is almost entirely removed, and where in consequence the checks to early marriages are very few, and large families are maintained with perfect facility, the rate at which the population increases is always the greatest?

And when to these broad and glaring facts we add, that neither theory nor experience will justify us in believing, either that the passion between the sexes, or the natural prolificness of women, diminishes in the progress of society; when we further consider that the climate of the United States of America is not particularly healthy, and that the qualities which mainly distinguish it from other countries, are its rapid production and distribution of the means of subsistence;—is not the induction as legitimate and correct as possible, that the varying weight of the difficulties attending the maintenance of families, and the moral restraint, vice and misery which these difficulties necessarily generate, are the causes of the varying rates of increase observable in different countries; and that, so far from having any reason to consider the American rate of increase as peculiar, unnatural and gigantic, we are bound by every law of induction and analogy to conclude that there is scarcely a state in Europe where, if the marriages were as early, the means of maintaining large families as ample, and the employments of the labouring classes as healthy, the rate of increase would not be as rapid, and in some cases, I have no doubt, even more rapid, than in the United States of America?

Another

Another of Mr. Weyland's curious illustrations is the following:—He says that the *physical tendency* of a people in a commercial and manufacturing state to double their number in twenty-five years is "as absolutely gone as the "tendency of a bean to shoot up further into "the air, after it has arrived at its full growth;" and that to assume such a *tendency* is to build a theory upon a mere shadow, "which, when "brought to the test, is directly at variance "with experience of the fact; and as unsafe "to act upon, as would be that of a general "who should assume the force of a musket-"shot to be double its actual range, and then "should calculate upon the death of all his "enemies as soon as he had drawn up his "own men for battle within this line of as-"sumed efficiency*."

Now I am not in the least aware who it is that has assumed the *actual* range of the shot, or the actual progress of population in different countries, as very different from what it is observed to be; and therefore cannot see how the illustration, as brought forward by Mr. Weyland, applies, or how I can be said to resemble his miscalculating general. What I have really done is this (if he will allow me the use of his own me-

* P. 126.

 taphor)

taphor) having observed that the range of musket-balls, projected from similar barrels and with the same quantity of powder of the same strength, was, under different circumstances, very different, I applied myself to consider what these circumstances were; and, having found that the range of each ball was greater or less in proportion to the smaller or greater number of the obstacles which it met with in its course, or the rarity or density of the medium through which it passed, I was led to infer that the variety of range observed was owing to these obstacles; and I consequently thought it a more correct and legitimate conclusion, and one more consonant both to theory and experience, to say that the *natural tendency* to a range of a certain extent, or the force impressed upon the ball, was always the same, and the actual range, whether long or short, only altered by external resistance; than to conclude that the different distances to which the balls reached must proceed from some mysterious change in the *natural tendency* of each bullet at different times, although no observable difference could be noticed either in the barrel or the charge.

I leave Mr. Weyland to determine which would be the conclusion of the natural philosopher, who was observing the different velocities

cities and ranges of projectiles passing through resisting media; and I do not see why the moral and political philosopher should proceed upon principles so totally opposite.

But the only arguments of Mr. Weyland against the *natural tendency* of the human race to increase faster than the means of subsistence, are a few of these illustrations which he has so unhappily applied, together with the acknowledged fact, that countries under different circumstances and in different stages of their progress, do really increase at very different rates.

Without dwelling therefore longer on such illustrations, it may be observed, with regard to the fact of the different rates of increase in different countries, that as long as it is a law of our nature that man cannot live without food, these different rates are as absolutely and strictly *necessary* as the differences in the power of producing food in countries more or less exhausted; and that to infer from these different rates of increase, as they are actually found to take place, that "population has a "*natural tendency* to keep within the powers "of the soil to afford it subsistence in every "gradation through which society passes," is just as rational as to infer that every man has a *natural tendency* to remain in prison who is necessarily

necessarily confined to it by four strong walls; or that the pine of the crowded Norwegian forest has no *natural* tendency to shoot out lateral branches, because there is no room for their growth. And yet this is Mr. Weyland's first and grand proposition, on which the whole of his work turns!!!

But though Mr. Weyland has not proved, or approached towards proving, that the *natural* tendency of population to increase is not unlimited; though he has not advanced a single reason to make it appear probable that a thousand millions would not be doubled in twenty-five years just as easily as a thousand, if moral restraint, vice and misery, were equally removed in both cases; yet there is one part of his argument, which undoubtedly might under certain circumstances be true; and if true, though it would in no respect impeach the premises of the Essay, it would essentially affect some of its conclusions.

The argument may be stated shortly thus;—that the natural division of labour arising from a very advanced state of society, particularly in countries where the land is rich, and great improvements have taken place in agriculture, might throw so large a portion of the people into towns, and engage so many in unhealthy occupations, that the immediate checks to population

pulation might be too powerful to be overcome even by an abundance of food.

It is admitted that this is a possible case; and, foreseeing this possibility, I provided for it in the terms in which the second proposition of the Essay was enunciated.

The only practical question then worth attending to between me and Mr. Weyland is, whether cases of the kind above stated are to be considered in the light in which I have considered them in the Essay, as exceptions of very rare occurrence, or in the light in which Mr. Weyland has considered them, as a state of things naturally accompanying every stage in the progress of improvement. On either supposition, population would still be repressed by some or other of the forms of moral restraint, vice or misery; but the moral and political conclusions, in the actual state of almost all countries, would be essentially different. On the one supposition moral restraint would, except in a few cases of the rarest occurrence, be one of the most useful and necessary of virtues; and on the other, it would be one of the most useless and unnecessary.

This question can only be determined by an appeal to experience. Mr. Weyland is always ready to refer to the state of this country; and, in fact, may be said almost to have built his system

system upon the peculiar policy of a single state. But the reference in this case will entirely contradict his theory. He has brought forward some elaborate calculations to shew the extreme difficulty with which the births of the country supply the demands of the towns and manufactories. In looking over them, the reader, without other information, would be disposed to feel considerable alarm at the prospect of depopulation impending over the country; or at least he would be convinced that we were within a hair's breadth of that formidable point of *non-reproduction*, at which, according to Mr. Weyland, the population *naturally* comes to a full stop before the means of subsistence cease to be progressive.

These calculations were certainly as applicable twenty years ago as they are now; and indeed they are chiefly founded on observations which were made at a greater distance of time than the period here noticed. But what has happened since? In spite of the enlargement of all our towns; in spite of the most rapid increase of manufactories, and of the proportion of people employed in them; in spite of the most extraordinary and unusual demands for the army and navy; in short, in spite of a state of things which, according to Mr. Weyland's theory, ought to have brought us long since to the point

point of *non-reproduction*, the population of the country has advanced at a rate more rapid than was ever known at any period of its history. During the ten years from 1800 to 1811, as I have mentioned in a former part of this work, the population of this country (even after making an allowance for the presumed deficiency of the returns in the first enumeration) increased at a rate which would double its numbers in fifty-five years.

This fact appears to me at once a full and complete refutation of the doctrine, that, as society advances, the increased indisposition to marriage and increased mortality in great towns and manufactories always overcome the principle of increase; and that, in the language of Mr. Weyland, "population, so far from having "an inconvenient tendency uniformly to press "against the means of subsistence, becomes "by degrees very slow in overtaking those "means."

With this acknowledged and glaring fact before him, and with the most striking evidences staring him in the face, that even, during this period of rapid increase, thousands both in the country and in towns were prevented from marrying so early as they would have done, if they had possessed sufficient means of supporting a family independently of parish

parish relief, it is quite inconceivable how a man of sense could bewilder himself in such a maze of futile calculations, and come to a conclusion so diametrically opposite to experience.

The fact already noticed, as it applies to the most advanced stage of society known in Europe, and proves incontrovertibly that the actual checks to population, even in the most improved countries, arise principally from an insufficiency of subsistence, and soon yield to increased resources, notwithstanding the increase of towns and manufactories, may I think fairly be considered as quite decisive of the question at issue.

But in treating of so general and extensive a subject as the Principle of Population, it would surely not be just to take our examples and illustrations only from a single state. And in looking at the other countries Mr. Weyland's doctrine on population is, if possible, still more completely contradicted. Where, I would ask, are the great towns and manufactories in Switzerland, Norway and Sweden, which are to act as *the graves of mankind,* and to prevent the possibility of a redundant population? In Sweden the proportion of the people living in the country is to those who live in town as 13 to 1; in England this proportion is about 2 to 1; and yet England increases much faster than Sweden. How is this

this to be reconciled with the doctrine that the progress of civilization and improvement is always accompanied by a correspondent abatement in the natural tendency of population to increase? Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have not on the whole been ill governed; but where are the necessary "anticipating alterations," which, according to Mr. Weyland, arise in every society as the powers of the soil diminish, and "render so many persons unwilling to marry, and so many more, who do marry, incapable of reproducing their own numbers, and of replacing the deficiency in the remainder*?". What is it that in these countries indisposes people to marry, but the absolute hopelessness of being able to support their families? What is it that renders many more who do marry incapable of reproducing their own numbers, but the diseases generated by excessive poverty—by an insufficient supply of the necessaries of life? Can any man of reflection look at these and many of the other countries of Europe, and then venture to state that there is no moral reason for repressing the inclination to early marriages; when it cannot be denied that the alternative of not repressing it must necessarily and unavoidably be premature mortality from excessive poverty? And

* P. 124.

is

is it possible to know that in few or none of the countries of Europe the wages of labour, determined in the common way by the supply and the demand, can support in health large families; and yet assert that population does not press against the means of subsistence, and that "the evils of a redundant population can "never be necessarily felt by a country till it "is actually peopled up to the full capacity of "its resources*?".

Mr. Weyland really appears to have dictated his book with his eyes blindfolded and his ears stopped. I have a great respect for his character and intentions; but I must say that it has never been my fortune to meet with a theory so uniformly contradicted by experience. The very slightest glance at the different countries of Europe shews with a force amounting to demonstration, that to all practical purposes the *natural tendency* of population to increase may be considered as a given quantity; and that the actual increase is regulated by the varying resources of each country for the employment and maintenance of labour, in whatever stage of its progress it may be, whether it is agricultural or manufacturing, whether it has few or many towns. Of course this actual increase, or the actual limits of po-

* P. 123.

pulation,

pulation, must always be far short of the utmost powers of the earth to produce food; first, because we can never rationally suppose that the human skill and industry actually exerted are directed in the best *possible* manner towards the production of food; and secondly, because as I have stated more particularly in a former part of this work, the greatest production of food which the powers of the earth would admit cannot possibly take place under a system of private property. But this acknowledged truth obviously affects only the actual quantity of food and the actual number of people, and has not the most distant relation to the question respecting the *natural tendency* of population to increase beyond the powers of the earth to produce food for it.

The observations already made are sufficient to shew that the four main propositions of Mr. Weyland, which depend upon the first, are quite unsupported by any appearances in the state of human society, as it is known to us in the countries with which we are acquainted. The last of these four propositions is the following:—"This tendency" (meaning the natural tendency of population to keep within the powers of the soil to afford it subsistence) "will have "its complete operation so as constantly to "maintain the people in comfort and plenty in "proportion

" proportion as religion, morality, rational li-
" berty and security of person and property ap-
" proach the attainment of a perfect influence [a]".

In the morality here noticed, moral or prudential restraint from marriage is not included: and so understood, I have no hesitation in saying that this proposition appears to me more directly to contradict the observed laws of nature than to assert that Norway might easily grow food for a thousand millions of inhabitants. I trust that I am disposed to attach as much importance to the effects of morality and religion on the happiness of society, even as Mr. Weyland; but among the moral duties, I certainly include a restraint upon the inclination to an early marriage when there is no reasonable prospect of maintenance for a family; and unless this species of virtuous self-denial be included in morality, I am quite at issue with Mr. Weyland; and so distinctly deny his proposition as to say that no degree of religion and morality, no degree of rational liberty and security of person and property, can under the existing laws of nature place the lower classes of society in a state of comfort and plenty.

With regard to Mr. Weyland's fifth and last proposition [b], I have already answered it in a

[a] C. iii. p. 21.
[b] Id. 22.

note

note which I have added, in the present edition, to the last chapter of the third book[a], and will only observe here that an illustration to shew the precedence of population to food, which I believe was first brought forward by an anonymous writer, and appears so to have pleased Mr. Grahame as to induce him to repeat it twice, is one which I would willingly take to prove the very opposite doctrine to that which it was meant to support. The apprehension that an increasing population would starve[b] unless a previous increase of food were procured for it, has been ridiculed by comparing it with the apprehension that increasing numbers would be obliged to go naked unless a previous increase of clothes should precede their births. Now however well or ill-founded may be our apprehensions in the former case, they are certainly quite justifiable in the latter; at least society has always acted as if it thought so. In the course of the next twenty-four hours there will be about 800 children born in England and Wales; and I will venture to say that there are not ten out of the whole number that come at the expected time, for whom clothes are not prepared before their births. It is said to be dangerous to meddle with edged tools

[a] Vol. iii. p. 46, et seq.

[b] This I have never said; I have only said that their condition would be deteriorated, which is strictly true.

which

which we do not know how to handle; and it is equally dangerous to meddle with illustrations which we do not know how to apply, and which may tend to prove exactly the reverse of what we wish.

On Mr. Weyland's theory it will not be necessary further to enlarge. With regard to the practical conclusions which he has drawn from it in our own country, they are such as might be expected from the nature of the premises. If population, instead of having a tendency to press against the means of subsistence, becomes by degrees very slow in overtaking them, Mr. Weyland's inference that we ought to encourage the increase of the labouring classes by abundant parochial assistance to families, might perhaps be maintained. But if his premises be entirely wrong, while his conclusions are still acted upon, the consequence must be, that universal system of unnecessary pauperism and dependence which we now so much deplore. Already above one-fourth of the population of England and Wales are regularly dependent upon parish relief; and if the system which Mr. Weyland recommends, and which has been so generally adopted in the midland counties, should extend itself over the whole kingdom, there is really no saying to what height the level of pauperism may rise. While the system of making an allowance from the

the parish for every child above two is confined to the labourers in agriculture, whom Mr. Weyland considers as the breeders of the country, it is essentially unjust, as it lowers without compensation the wages of the manufacturer and artificer: and when it shall become just by including the whole of the working classes, what a dreadful picture does it present! what a scene of equality, indolence, rags and dependence, among one-half or three-fourths of the society! Under such a system to expect any essential benefit from *saving banks* or any other institutions to promote industry and economy is perfectly preposterous. When the wages of labour are reduced to the level to which this system tends, there will be neither power nor motive to save.

Mr. Weyland strangely attributes much of the wealth and prosperity of England to the cheap population which it raises by means of the poor-laws; and seems to think that, if labour had been allowed to settle at its natural rate, and all workmen had been paid in proportion to their skill and industry, whether with or without families, we should never have attained that commercial and manufacturing ascendancy by which we have been so eminently distinguished.

A practical refutation of so ill-founded an

opinion may be seen in the state of Scotland, which in proportion to its natural resources has certainly increased in agriculture, manufactures and commerce, during the last fifty years, still more rapidly than England, although it may fairly be said to have been essentially without poor-laws.

It is not easy to determine what is the price of labour most favourable to the progress of wealth. It is certainly conceivable that it may be too high for the prosperity of foreign commerce. But I believe it is much more frequently too low; and I doubt if there has ever been an instance in any country of very great prosperity in foreign commerce, where the working classes have not had good money wages. It is impossible to sell very largely without being able to buy very largely; and no country can buy very largely in which the working classes are not in such a state as to be able to purchase foreign commodities.

But nothing tends to place the lower classes of society in this state so much as a demand for labour which is allowed to take its natural course, and which therefore pays the unmarried man and the man with a family at the same rate; and consequently gives at once to a very large mass of the working classes the power of purchasing foreign articles of consumption, and

of

of paying taxes on luxuries to no inconsiderable extent. While, on the other hand, nothing would tend so effectually to destroy the power of the working classes of society to purchase either home manufactures or foreign articles of consumption, or to pay taxes on luxuries, as the practice of doling out to each member of a family an allowance, in the shape of wages and parish relief combined, just sufficient, or only a very little more than to furnish them with the mere food necessary for their maintenance.

To shew that, in looking forward to such an increased operation of prudential restraint as would greatly improve the condition of the poor, it is not necessary to suppose extravagant and impossible wages, as Mr. Weyland seems to think, I will refer to the proposition of a practical man on the subject of the price of labour; and certainly much would be done, if this proposition could be realized, though it must be effected in a very different way from that which he has proposed.

It has been recommended by Mr. Arthur Young so to adjust the wages of day-labour as to make them at all times equivalent to the purchase of a peck of wheat. This quantity, he says, was earned by country labourers during a considerable period of the last century, when

the poor-rates were low, and not granted to assist in the maintenance of those who were able to work. And he goes on to observe that, "as the labourer would (in this case) receive 70 bushels of wheat for 47 weeks' labour, exclusive of five weeks for harvest; and as a family of six persons consumes in a year no more than 48 bushels; it is clear that such wages of labour would cut off every pretence of parochial assistance; and of necessity the conclusion would follow, that all right to it in men thus paid should be annihilated for ever *."

An adjustment of this kind, either enforced by law or used as a guide in the distribution of parish assistance, as suggested by Mr. Young, would be open to insuperable objections. At particular times it might be the means of converting a dearth into a famine. And in its general operation, and supposing no change of habits among the labouring classes, it would be tantamount to saying that, under all circumstances, whether the affairs of the country were prosperous or adverse; whether its resources in land were still great, or nearly exhausted; the population ought to increase exactly at the same rate,—a conclusion which involves an impossibility.

If however this adjustment, instead of being

* Annals of Agriculture, No. 270, p. 91, note.

enforced

enforced by law, were produced by the increasing operation of the prudential check to marriage, the effect would be totally different, and in the highest degree beneficial to society. A gradual change in the habits of the labouring classes would then effect the necessary retardation in the rate of increase, and would proportion the supply of labour to the effective demand, as society continued to advance, not only without the pressure of a diminishing quantity of food, but under the enjoyment of an increased quantity of conveniences and comforts; and in the progress of cultivation and wealth the condition of the lower classes of society would be in a state of constant improvement.

A peck of wheat a day cannot be considered in any light as excessive wages. In the early periods of cultivation, indeed, when corn is low in exchangeable value, much more is frequently earned; but in such a country as England, where the price of corn, compared with manufactures and foreign commodities, is high, it would do much towards placing the great mass of the labouring classes in a state of comparative comfort and independence; and it would be extremely desirable, with a view to the virtue and happiness of human society, that no land should be taken into cultivation

that

that could not pay the labourers employed upon it to this amount.

With these wages as the average minimum, all those who were unmarried, or, being married, had small families, would be extremely well off; while those who had large families, though they would unquestionably be subjected sometimes to a severe pressure, would in general be able, by the sacrifice of conveniences and comforts, to support themselves without parish assistance. And not only would the amount and distribution of the wages of labour greatly increase the stimulus to industry and economy throughout all the working classes of the society, and place the great body of them in a very superior situation, but it would furnish them with the means of making an effectual demand for a great amount of foreign commodities and domestic manufactures, and thus, at the same time that it would promote individual and general happiness, would advance the mercantile and manufacturing prosperity of the country[a].

Mr. Weyland,

[a] The merchants and manufacturers who so loudly clamour for cheap corn and low money wages, think only of selling their commodities abroad, and often forget that they have to find a market for their returns at home, which they can never do to any great extent, when the money

Mr. Weyland, however, finds it utterly impossible to reconcile the necessity of moral restraint either with the nature of man, or the plain dictates of religion on the subject of marriage. Whether the check to population, which he would substitute for it, is more consistent with the nature of a rational being, the precepts of revelation, and the benevolence of the Deity, must be left to the judgment of the reader. This check, it is already known, is no other than the unhealthiness and mortality of towns and manufactories*. And though I have never felt any difficulty in reconciling to the goodness of the Deity the necessity of practising the virtue of moral restraint in a state allowed to be a state of discipline and trial; yet I confess that I could make no attempt to reason on the subject, if I were obliged to believe, with Mr. Weyland, that a large proportion of the

money wages of the working classes, and monied incomes in general, are low. One of the principal causes of the check which foreign commerce has experienced during the last two or three years, has been the great diminution of the home market for foreign produce.

* With regard to the indisposition to marriage in towns, I do not believe that it is greater than in the country, except as far as it arises from the greater expense of maintaining a family, and the greater facility of illicit intercourse.

human

human race was doomed by the inscrutable ordinations of Providence to a premature death in large towns.

If indeed such peculiar unhealthiness and mortality were the proper and natural check to the progress of population in the advanced stages of society, we should justly have reason to apprehend that, by improving the healthiness of our towns and manufactories, as we have done in England during the last twenty years, we might really defeat the designs of Providence. And though I have too much respect for Mr. Weyland to suppose that he would deprecate all attempts to diminish the mortality of towns, and render manufactories less destructive to the health of the children employed in them; yet certainly his principles lead to this conclusion, since his theory has been completely destroyed by those laudable efforts which have made the mortality of England—a country abounding in towns and manufactories, less than the mortality of Sweden—a country in a state almost purely agricultural.

It was my object in the two chapters on *Moral Restraint*, and its *Effects on Society*, to shew that the evils arising from the principle of population were exactly of the same nature as the evils arising from the excessive or irregular gratification of the human passions in general; and

and that from the existence of these evils we had no more reason to conclude that the principle of increase was too strong for the purpose intended by the Creator, than to infer, from the existence of the vices arising from the human passions, that these passions required diminution or extinction, instead of regulation and direction.

If this view of the subject be allowed to be correct, it will naturally follow that, notwithstanding the acknowledged evils occasioned by the principle of population, the advantages derived from it under the present constitution of things may very greatly overbalance them.

A slight sketch of the nature of these advantages, as far as the main object of the Essay would allow, was given in the two chapters to which I have alluded; but the subject has lately been pursued with considerable ability in the Work of Mr. Sumner on the Records of the Creation; and I am happy to refer to it as containing a masterly developement and completion of views, of which only an intimation could be given in the Essay.

I fully agree with Mr. Sumner as to the beneficial effects which result from the principle of population, and feel entirely convinced that the natural tendency of the human race to increase faster than the possible increase of the means

of

of subsistence could not be either destroyed or essentially diminished without diminishing that hope of rising and fear of falling in society, so necessary to the improvement of the human faculties and the advancement of human happiness. But with this conviction on my mind, I feel no wish to alter the view which I have given of the evils arising from the principle of population. These evils do not lose their name or nature because they are overbalanced by good: and to consider them in a different light on this account, and cease to call them evils, would be as irrational as the objecting to call the irregular indulgences of passion vicious, and to affirm that they lead to misery, because our passions are the main sources of human virtue and happiness.

I have always considered the principle of population as a law peculiarly suited to a state of discipline and trial. Indeed I believe that, in the whole range of the laws of nature with which we are acquainted, not one can be pointed out, which in so remarkable a manner tends to strengthen and confirm this scriptural view of the state of man on earth. And as each individual has the power of avoiding the evil consequences to himself and society resulting from the principle of population by the practice of a virtue clearly dictated to him by the light of nature,

nature, and sanctioned by revealed religion, it must be allowed that the ways of God to man with regard to this great law of nature are completely vindicated.

I have, therefore, certainly felt surprise as well as regret that no inconsiderable part of the objections which have been made to the principles and conclusions of the Essay on Population has come from persons for whose moral and religious character I have so high a respect, that it would have been particularly gratifying to me to obtain their approbation and sanction. This effect has been attributed to some expressions used in the course of the work which have been thought too harsh, and not sufficiently indulgent to the weaknesses of human nature, and the feelings of Christian charity.

It is probable, that having found the bow bent too much one way, I was induced to bend it too much the other, in order to make it straight. But I shall always be quite ready to blot out any part of the work which is considered by a competent tribunal as having a tendency to prevent the bow from becoming finally straight, and to impede the progress of truth. In deference to this tribunal I have already expunged the passages which have been most objected to, and I have made some few further corrections of the same kind in the present edition.

edition. By these alterations I hope and believe that the work has been improved without impairing its principles. But I still trust that whether it is read with or without these alterations, every reader of candour must acknowledge that the practical design uppermost in the mind of the writer, with whatever want of judgment it may have been executed, is to improve the condition and increase the happiness of the lower classes of society.

FINIS.

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